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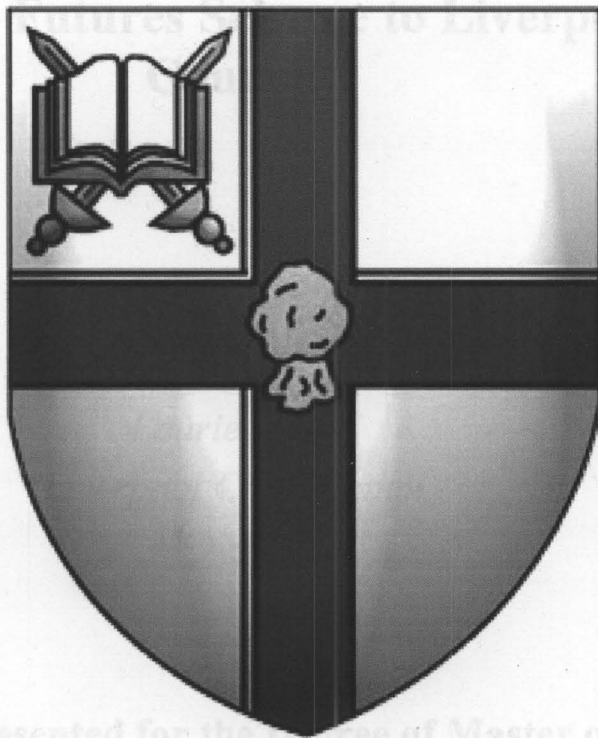
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An Assessment on the Strategic and Operational  
Impact of the



A Dissertation presented for the Degree of Master of Business

# **CHESTER**

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## **BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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**Department of Business and Management Studies**

**An Assessment on the Strategic and Operational  
Impact of the Futures Scheme to Liverpool City  
Council**

*Laurie Lyall  
Liverpool City Council  
May 2007*

**A Dissertation presented for the Degree of Master of Business  
Administration**

**Chester Business School**

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## **Abstract**

In 2006 Sports Services launched its Futures Scheme, an initiative that allowed children and young persons to access sports facilities at no charge. The drivers for the scheme introduction were cited as being to improve health and social benefits. Components of the research are operational impact and critical analysis of strategic change. The scheme is challenging Sports Services to indicate its value to the citizens of Liverpool by the removal of charges as a barrier to accessing sporting opportunities. Analysis has indicated that operational impact manifested in stress, communication failings and budgetary pressures. Further analysis also indicates that the provision and evaluation of such schemes require a multi agency approach due to the complexity of sport provision for children for health and social benefits. A review is required of the scheme that was initially popular but interest has declined due to lack of variety. The removal of price as a barrier is not sufficiently stimulating to maintain high attendances.

**Declaration**

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose.  
All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the Research

The provision of sport and recreation is a non-statutory service for local authorities; there being no obligation to provide sports and leisure facilities for their citizens. However, central government recognises that local authorities have a key role to play in delivering national agendas on health, young people, communities and social inclusion through the provision of sport and recreation – a philosophy that has been embraced by Liverpool City Council (LCC). To illustrate this one need look no further than the provisions contained within the 2006/07 budget that launched a free leisure initiative for younger people, the Futures Scheme.

This commitment by LCC in terms of policy objectives and financial resources is in recognition of the role that sport and recreation plays within the Capital of Culture 2008 framework and its contribution to the achievement of LCC's overall corporate objectives to improve the health and quality of life of the citizens of Liverpool (Corporate Plan, 2006/07). The following statement effectively captures the mood within LCC with regard to sport and recreation:

*There is an added value which sport gives to the culture of a city like Liverpool and the region and indeed the country. Sometimes that value is difficult to measure but there is no doubt that sport can make a positive contribution to the lives of Liverpool's citizens.*

*Warren Bradley, 2003, (now Leader of the Council)*

The Local Government Act, 1999, obliges local authorities to continually improve their services to the public; however the provision of sports services is discretionary. Local Authorities spend £3.2 billion annually on cultural services including sport. Most of that

expenditure is in conjunction with the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), Liverpool Sport and Recreation Strategy 2003 – 2008.

#### 1.1.1 Central Government Strategies - Shared Priorities

*Culture and sport are powerful tools for building community cohesion. Activities like football, music, dance, local history and filmmaking offer natural opportunities for people to come together and participate in community life. They break down barriers between diverse groups and can help create a sense of local pride and belonging.*

*Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2004*

The DCMS's approach to sport is that of shared priorities of central government and local government as it considers this has the potential to make a real – and increasing – impact on the delivery of local sports provision. Local authorities are expected to deliver the outcomes set out in the shared priorities of central and local government. In the revised approach to comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), from late 2005 onwards, the delivery of the shared priorities by local authorities will form part of the corporate assessment block.

Sports facilities and services that are provided or enabled by the local authority and its partners that are contributing to safe, strong and sustainable communities will help to demonstrate that an authority is taking a proactive approach to delivering the shared priority outcomes.

In addition, the revised CPA approach is likely to include joint area reviews for children and young people services and service block assessments for environment and cultural services. Sports services that are meeting the needs of children and young people and the wider community, contributing to the local environment, helping to build community capacity and creating more cohesive communities will help an authority to demonstrate that it is providing services that local people value and that meet local needs.



Details of Liverpool City Council's commitment can be found in their Children and Young People's Plan 2006 – 2009 that was produced after extensive consultation with its citizens and key stakeholders.

Cited in section two:

*'Children and young people need access to healthy, grown up activities to enable them to be treated like young adults', (A Parent)*

*'I think that it is important for your health to exercise at least once a day. Being fat is a problem – you can get really ill', (A young person)*

The key priority 1 of the Children and Young Peoples Plan is to, reduce childhood obesity and promote a culture of physical activity.

It is cited in the Plan that there has to be a focus on tackling childhood obesity and indicates that the Futures Scheme will increase participation by targeted groups and hence lifestyle changes. However questions remain regarding operational and strategic impacts, and in particular how the council intend to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme.

#### 1.1.2 Futures Scheme

In May 2005, Liverpool City Council launched the Futures Scheme. Under the scheme children aged 17 and under would be able to access free of charge activities at sports centres and swimming pools. The purpose of the scheme is to ensure that Liverpool children have the opportunity to participate in sport and healthy physical activity as often as possible and to help the Council achieve the following corporate objectives:

- Reduce childhood obesity
- Increase sports participation by children to a minimum of 2 hours per week
- Reduce incident of anti-social behaviour
- Deliver the Children and Young People's Plan priority of healthy and active lifestyles

To access the scheme children are required to present a Future Lifestyles membership card when they visit a sports centre. Application forms were issued at Liverpool schools and submitted at a sports centre whereby a Future Lifestyles membership card was issued. Application forms were available at Sports Centres for children who missed the school distribution process and the passes would be valid from the day of issue. The membership cards track the usage made of the scheme by individual children.

The court and pitch activities are available for children if they were available for booking on the day of requirement. The most popular activities are swimming and lifestyles gymnasiums due to their availability and the casual usage patterns that they attract. The financial implications of the scheme are that there will be an annual cost to the council of £300,000, the majority of which represents lost income from existing junior customers.

## 1.2 Research Question

The introduction of the Futures Scheme by LCC is considered an integral part of an overarching policy to reduce childhood obesity and promote a culture of physical activity. The Futures Scheme and the drivers, health and social, behind it represent a fundamental change in service delivery whereby the barrier of price was removed for children and young persons to access activities at sports centres and swimming pools free of charge

The purpose of this paper and the research question to be addressed is:

### *An Assessment on the Strategic and Operational Impact of the Futures Scheme to Liverpool City Council*

This study aims to critically analyse the operational impact of the Futures Scheme and evaluate the effectiveness of the service delivery. Perceptions will be sought from a cross section of Sports Services staff to establish variances and identify strategic gaps. The study also aims to establish efficacy of the scheme from an end users perspective.

Principal tensions and established theory that will be critiqued will be proponents of strategy and change management.

### 1.3 Justification for the research

The introduction of the Futures Scheme by LCC represents a change in emphasis for its Sports Services. Prior to the scheme the priority was to maximise income by attracting paying customers while keeping a strict budgetary control of expenditure. This approach resulted in the customer base being predominantly adult.

The research will be assessed by the senior management team to establish the efficacy of the scheme and has also resulted in further research being commissioned by the Council's market research section with children and young people for their opinions of the Scheme.

### 1.4 Methodology

A phenomenological and positivist approach has been adopted for the research as qualitative and quantitative techniques are combined to give a balance to the findings. Secondary data has been collated by making comparisons on user trends available from Sports Services management information system (MIS). Information has also been obtained from focus groups of children and young persons

Primary data has been collected from a variety of sources that includes: case study approach, semis structured interviews, and semi structured focus groups of front line staff. Although common themes are explored from the respective primary data sources findings are not shared so as to not unduly influence responses.

### 1.5 Defining the Terms

Operations management is about the activities carried out by an organisation to provide the service to customers or clients which is its basic reason for existing, Johnson, (1998). To analyse this further it has to be established what type of service is being delivered and how the introduction of the Futures Scheme has impacted.

However cited, Silvestro (1998), a key challenge for professional services is to be able to adapt to the changing needs of clients and Sports Services have clearly indicated their intention in changing of typology of service. However the research will endeavour to analyse the strategic fit of the scheme and how this has influenced operational strategy.

Liverpool City Council's (LCC) executive management team (EMT) have stated their intent to improve services as many of the services that are provided have been identified as being poor by the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) process, while Sports Services despite being considered as 'good' has an 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. This assessment has been made despite the inspectors being aware of the Futures Scheme.

The main strategic driver for LCC to change is to become an excellent council and improve its services. As cited, Mintzberg, Quinn, and Ghoshal (1999)...to manage strategy is frequently to manage change – to recognise when a shift of strategic nature is possible, desirable, and necessary. However a key question of this study will be to analyse nature of the change of direction that the introduction of the Futures Scheme has signalled. The primary aspect of the research was to analyse how Sports Services managed the change process.

Sports Services had recognised that strategic change was desirable and necessary but the adoption of a strategy that would make change possible was challenging. Joyce (1999) cites that the increased demand for efficiency and reduced unit costs may be causing the public service to streamline its operations and this was the main challenge that LCC had to face up to. The increased attendances that the scheme inevitably would attract could help to reduce unit costs and therefore improve efficiency.

## 1.6 Summary

This chapter has provided the background of the research into the LCC's Sports Services introduction of the Futures Scheme and raises the research paradigm:

*An Assessment on the Strategic and Operational Impact of the Futures Scheme to Liverpool City Council*

The research has been justified with methodological stances stated and established. Definitions of terms have been provided to assist with understanding and to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation.

Details of the Futures Scheme have been provided along with most recent ranking of Sports Services, now in the Cultural Portfolio, by the CPA inspectors.

A detailed description of the research now follows with the literature review in chapter two. Chapter three provides details of methodology and research techniques. Chapter four provides the findings of the research, and chapter five provides research conclusions and recommendations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

Britain's under – 16's now watch 17 hours of television a week, Freedland (2005) and research has indicated that a reduction would be a promising approach to preventing obesity in children, Nestle and Jacobsen (2000). Reduced physical activity in the UK population cited by Wanless (2004) is due to the use of cars for short journeys, sedentary occupations, and lower sports participation, parental reluctance to allow children to play outdoors, increased time pressures reducing school sport, and greater television and computer use. Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has suggested 'the problem is not the number of calories kids are taking in, but the fact that they are doing less to burn them off'.

### 2.2 Government Policy

Government action is evident by its intent on tackling the issue of health related inactivity by stating 'action on diet and exercise to tackle heart disease, cancer, diabetes, strokes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and a range of factors critical to health' (DH White Paper 2004).

Children and young persons are also perceived as being at risk when in July 2004 a joint government public sector agreement target for Departments of Health, Culture Media and Sport and Education and Skills committed to 'halting the year on year rise in obesity among children under 11 by 2010' (Department of Health 2004a).

#### 2.2.1 Children Act 2004

The Children's Act 2004 provides the legal underpinning for Every Child Matters: Change for Children - the programme aimed at transforming children's services.

The guidance on the duty to cooperate (section 10 of the act), provides the underpinning framework for children's trusts. Well-being is the term used in the act to define the five Every Child Matters outcomes:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe

- Enjoy and achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

Children and young people will have far more to say about issues that affect them as individuals and collectively.

### 2.2.2 Youth Matters

In July 2005 the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) published the 'Youth Matters', a Green Paper building on the proposals outlined in 'Every Child Matters. The proposals also recognise the importance of teenagers enjoying good emotional and physical health which are inseparable from learning and achievement

### 2.2.3 Physical Education, School Sport and Club Links Strategy (PESSCL)

The PESSCL was launched by the DfES in 2002, the overall objective strategy is to enhance the take up of sporting opportunities by 5 – 16 year olds. The Government aim that by 2010 all children will be offered four hours of sport each week within the curriculum, and 2 – 3 hours of sport each week beyond the school day delivered by a range of school, community and club providers.

### 2.2.4 Game Plan (2002)

However the successes or failures of local authority provision in providing leisure and meeting social objectives have been researched, Robinson and Taylor (2003) and Taylor and Godfrey (2003) and one concurrent factor is raised:

Leisure policy rarely has any major political priority in its own right as it is not likely to be influential in determining the outcome of elections.

2.3 Exercise Recommendations for Children and Young persons

Exercise recommendations for children have changed over recent years as the subject has received increasing interest and research.

Cale and Harris (2001) argued that exercise recommendations for young people needed updating, indicating that earlier recommendations reflected those of adults as formulated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, American College of Sports Medicine, (ACSM), 1986; Hakell et al., 1985; Pate and Blair, 1978; Riopel et al., 1986; Rowland 1981.

However the ACSM, recognising that the needs of adults and children differed, published an ‘Opinion Statement’ on physical fitness in children and youth’ in 1988 in what appears to be one of the earliest indications regarding the health and fitness of young persons. This change of thinking and move towards specific guidelines resulted in the development of the Children’s Lifetime Physical Activity Model, (Corbin et al, 1994), as detailed in table 1.

Table 1. Children’s Lifetime Physical Activity Model

Author/Year	Opinion Statement (ACSM, 1988)	The Children’s Lifetime Physical Activity Model (Corbin et al., 1994)
Target Group		
Frequency		e
Intensity		
Time		



Type	
------	--

Cale and Harris (2001), also indicate at that time, the early 1990s, it was acknowledged that the optimal amount of physical activity was not known however further research by Sallis and Patrick, (1994), produced two sets of guidelines for adolescents (11 – 21 years) as detailed in table 2.

Table 2. Physical Activity Guidelines for Adolescents (11 – 21 years), Sallis and Patrick, 1994.

	Guideline 1	Guideline 2
Frequency		
Intensity		
Time		
Type		arge

Cale and Harris, (2001), do recognise the change of exercise recommendation by Sallis and Patrick (1994) puts an emphasis on energy expended rather than recommend times for doing exercise and also that allowances could be made for the inclusion of activity into

lifestyle. However, Cale and Harris, (2001), note that these recommendations were largely unnoticed outside the USA but similar concerns in England resulted in the HEA [1] initiating a review of the promotion of health enhancing physical activity for young people, (HEA, 1998b). The consultation and research process in particular by Pate et al., 1998b, resulted in the final policy framework, *Young and Active?* (HEA, 1998a).

Cale and Harris, (2001), cite that the update recommendations are: realistic, have an emphasis on enjoyment, are relevant and flexible, and have a focus on different types of fitness and furthermore a holistic approach is required for health promotion and to develop and work in partnerships for successful delivery.

## 2.4 Education and Children's Exercise

### 2.4.1 Teacher's Perceptions on Children's Exercise

Schools are cited by Cale and Harris, (2001) as an essential partner but there are concerns regarding the role of physical education teachers and whether they consider that the links of exercise and health is within their remit. Further tensions are raised when physical education teachers' perceptions on health promotion are explored by Green and Thurston, (2002). Findings included that many teachers' views on physical education assumed a logical link with health and that their subject had a major role for health promotion.

A tension arising is whether teacher's perceptions are based on the assumed link between exercise and health, rather than a change of emphasis on to the health benefits of regular activity as indicated by Cale and Harris, (2001). One teacher cites, 'Quite a big thing is made about the health side of things...I see it as important, It affects the nation basically. It affects me because...if we can cut down the costs of the NHS etc. etc., then that will all have benefits [for] everybody.' Despite this observation there appears to be no indication that PE teachers teaching methods have changed, yet there is a recognition that children are less fit as an anecdotal observation being 'I think the natural fitness of children is not what it was; they are ferried about from place to place'.

The research by Green and Thurston (2002) does indicate that PE teachers consider their role in health promotion to be essential however there appears to be little evidence of

actually promoting sport as a healthy activity and explaining the health benefits to their pupils. Their research indicates that the role of PE teachers in health promotion is seen as improving fitness and the perceptions could be interpreted as being defensive as responses indicated a justification for PE. The research does not explore gender or cultural identities of children and this is clearly perceived as an important issue by children in research by Mulvihill, Rivers, and Aggleton (2000), on the views of young people towards physical activity

Green and Thurston (2002) conclude by arguing that there are health promotion gaps in the delivery of exercise by PE teachers and despite their perceptions their emphasis on team sports may be counter productive. Roberts (1996b, p.113) observes...concentrating on sport and team games in the PE curricula will almost certainly lead to a flight from sport by Britain's young people. This argument is also supported by Penney and Evans' (1999, p. 131), 'There remains tensions and contradictions between the discourses of sport and health in relation to physical education'

#### 2.4.2 Children's Perception of Exercise

Mulvihill, Rivers, and Aggleton (2000) research with children aged 11 to 15 years revealed negative attitudes towards PE at schools, in particular female students who considered it to be boring and in some cases an infringement of privacy. However female students were aware of the perceived benefits of physical activity for weight control but there appeared to be significant reluctance to participate in regular activity, especially by young Asians.

A case is made for exercise for boys and girls to be considered as separate issues particularly as boys appear to be participate in more regular activity and in most cases are either oblivious to the benefits of exercise or simply enjoy playing sport.

Femininity and masculinity are referred to as discussion points and this is an area that may require further research. Activities or sport may be perceived as being unfeminine to young girls especially during puberty, while young boys may associate sport and activity with masculinity and therefore more attractive.

The research concludes by indicating that there is no universally popular activity and that choosing an activity to provide for children is like aiming at a moving target and there is a danger of promoting an inappropriate or boring activity. This seems to indicate that PE in schools is inflexible and concentrates on traditional team sports, while children are now discerning regarding activity choices as they are aware of a wider range and choice. This is supported by the views of children who consider that free access to leisure centre would be positive.

The views of children are also explored by Dixey et al, (2001), and there appears to be confusion by children surrounding healthy eating and dieting, Hill and Silver, (1995), and it is further cited that fat children tend to be stereotyped as lazy, stupid, unfit, dirty, unpopular and likely to lie, but children do not stereotype peers that are known to them.

There also appears to be a 'gap' in education as regards physical activity and benefits when the research indicates a common view of children was that size did not matter if exercise was not involved in the career, 'like an engineer that doesn't need exercise'.

Dixey et al, (2001), acknowledge that children have to manage their body image in a society in which obesity is increasing and which pressures to be slim have perhaps never been greater, but it appears that peer pressure may be the most powerful influence on children.

It is cited that bullying of fat children was commonplace and that boys felt pressure to 'pick on' others and of concern is an example where a child was taunted for being 'chubby' when playing tennis, so stopped playing tennis and went on a diet instead.

Burrows, Eves, and Cooper (1999) research on children's perceptions of exercise support the view of gender differences but highlights that motivational factors are a barrier. Lack of energy and enjoyment were cited which may indicate entrenched resistance to exercise by children. Recent research by Sport England also identifies barriers to exercise as being perceived as 'too boring' and there was a real concern over being hit, kicked or falling over during sport. The research is specifically about perceptions of exercise and not activities such play and lifestyle choices, but it also makes reference to the link between active childhood and active adulthood and refers to Natapoff, (1982), if children are less exposed to physical activity while their belief systems evolve, exercise may be afforded less priority in later years. Gender issues are again referred to with boy's apparent intrinsic motivation

for physical activity but girl's construal of exercise as a means for controlling of weight at age nine is seen as a major concern for health professionals.

## 2.5 Health Initiatives for Children

A number of health initiatives have been introduced as a result of the increasing concerns for health due to inactivity and one such is Health Education Trusts (HET) as researched by Higgs (2004). While advocating an active lifestyle as per the latest policy recommendations it focuses on the link between diet and health and argues that Health Education Trusts (HET) has a role to play.

The HET is a UK registered charity created to promote the development of health promotion for young people in the UK. Higgs (2004) is critical of schools for the provision of poor meals that may contribute to pupils' poor health and of vending machines offering unhealthy snacks. When this factor is combined with Green and Thurston (2002) criticism of PE teacher's delivery of PE, it could be argued a trend for schools for producing more unhealthy children and young people is inevitable.

Another such scheme researched by Corrie et al (2003) includes the National Health School Standard (NHSS), which aims to integrate health promotion into the life and curriculum of every school. Ultimately it is intended to have a positive impact on future generations and the research concentrates on one such school where there was success in Nottingham. A key to the success appears to be the successful engagement of partners such as health professionals and nutritionists, and the introduction of regular activities such as 'jazzercise'. The success in Nottingham demonstrates a successful inter agency model that others could benefit from.

Blake (2005) also supports an alliance approach indicating that an active lifestyle should be within health education with key partner approaches, and also argues for children to be involved in the decision making process. However despite arguing for consultation there is no detail on how best to pursue this option and as already cited in this review the methodology of obtaining information from children can be complex.

## 2.6 Children's Activities and the Urban Environment

Rutten et al (2003) explores the issue of how the urban environment has an impact on children's activities and thus their health. While recognising the need for leisure facilities in communities they argue for the modification of the urban environment in order to promote physical activity such as the creation of walking trails and bike paths. They cite that, this requires intersectional efforts and new alliances between sport scientists, sport organisations, sports policy and government departments such as city planning, traffic and environment.

## 2.7 Youth Sport and Crime Reduction

Social benefits cited by 'Game Plan 2002' include crime reduction indicating that there is a widely held view that sport can have value as part of a package of measures to tackle crime. Sport for children and in particular teenagers has been utilised as an interventionist tool for reducing crime. One such scheme is the Positive Futures Scheme that was launched in 2000. The scheme is a national sports and activity based social inclusion programme, which was funded by the Home Office Crime and Drug Strategy Directorate.

Research commissioned by Sport England by Leisure Futures Limited includes the following:

- A reduction of up to 77% in recorded crime in every area where Positive Futures projects are happening
- Positive changes in behaviour and lifestyle for many youngsters who were deemed to be at risk
- An increase in sports participation with many youngsters joining sports clubs
- Tangible improvements in health for many young people, with support and encouragement for those struggling to give up drugs or alcohol.

Despite these findings Sport England do issue a cautionary note as it acknowledges that much of the research has admitted methodological difficulties especially complex relationships between cause and effect.

## 2.8 Sport Intervention Programmes

It could be argued that other intervention programmes could have been just as successful and perhaps surveys of what young people want could result in programmes being bespoke to local community needs. Gray and Seddon, (2005) evaluated prevention work with children disaffected from school in Manchester. One such scheme was based on football, which had limited success while another scheme was based on horticulture which was more successful. The term 'dosage' is used to describe the amount of intervention that is delivered to the young persons and they ask the question, how much is enough? Was the 'dosage' of sport, despite being less than the horticulture programme meet the needs more readily, or conversely was the sport intervention programme not sufficiently stimulating?

An intervention programme for health reasons is researched by Tyrers (2005) whereby families with overweight and obese children are requesting help and the impact of such programmes that involves swimming, football, and trampolining is assessed. The findings concur with the Health Development Agency (2003) that targeting parents and children together in such a manner is effective.

## 2.9 Charges as a perceived barrier to sport

A perceived barrier to sport participation may be charges, but Coulter (2002) indicates that this could possibly be a misconception. The City of Glasgow introduced a free-swimming programme in 2002 for children and the data analysed seems to indicate that entrance charges alone may act as a constraint for a minority. Other factors included the value placed on the activity, the nature of the activity and associated fixed and variable costs. Free access it concludes can lead to substantially increased usage, the initial high volume increases can not be sustained. However the initial increase of attendances is encouraging and other such programmes should use this information for the anticipated decrease in demand. A consultation process as argued for by Blake (2005) could enable such programmes to maintain sufficient and satisfying stimulation.

## 2.10 Summary

Research by Armstrong (2004) indicates that obesity 'time bomb' may have credence by indicating a link between adults health and well being with behaviour during childhood and

adolescence and cites Malina, 1996, that inactive young people are unlikely to become physically active adults. However it is also argued that there is no evidence that indicates that children have low levels of aerobic fitness or that aerobic fitness has deteriorated over the last 60 years. Concerns with these finding from a leisure provider's perspective would be the relevance of such statements as the lack of specific research as stated does not necessarily indicate that the health and fitness related issue is not there.

Cale and Harris also support the concept that active living begins in childhood but their research indicates the importance of explaining why regular activity can be of benefit. The need for flexibility and an emphasis on enjoyment is also stressed and a need for realism about realism about time and frequency. The Chief Medicals officer (UK) recommends the benefits of exercise can only be achieved by participating in sport or activity for five 30 minute aerobic type sessions each week and for children to partaking in 3 hours of exercise or activity outside of school hours.

There is an old Japanese proverb that goes: 'Strategy without action is only a day-dream, but action without strategy is a nightmare'. The delivery of health related activities for children is a multi agency conundrum, as stakeholders are aware of the paradigm there is little evidence of a strategic approach at local level.

#### 2.1.1. Strategic Leadership

Graetz (2000), argues that the primary task of management today is the leadership of organisational change, and delivering healthy and active options for children requires a leader, or change agent, to transcend organisational politics and consider an integrated approach. The NHS and local authorities are subject to bench marking to assist performance improvement, but for strategic change to be introduced it will require leadership qualities to drive it forward, as argued by Holloway, Francis, and Hinton, (1999), complex approaches to performance improvement such as benchmarking are only as effective as the people that apply them.



2.12 Cultural Processes

The institutionalised way that organisations behave is largely based on the past experiences of the individuals within the organisation. The use of a cultural web for the Sports Services and potential partners can identify the underlying issues with strategic change. A successful strategy with two ‘partners’ will require organisational change, and as Smith (2005) argues people are both the essential factor in organisational change and at time the biggest obstacle.

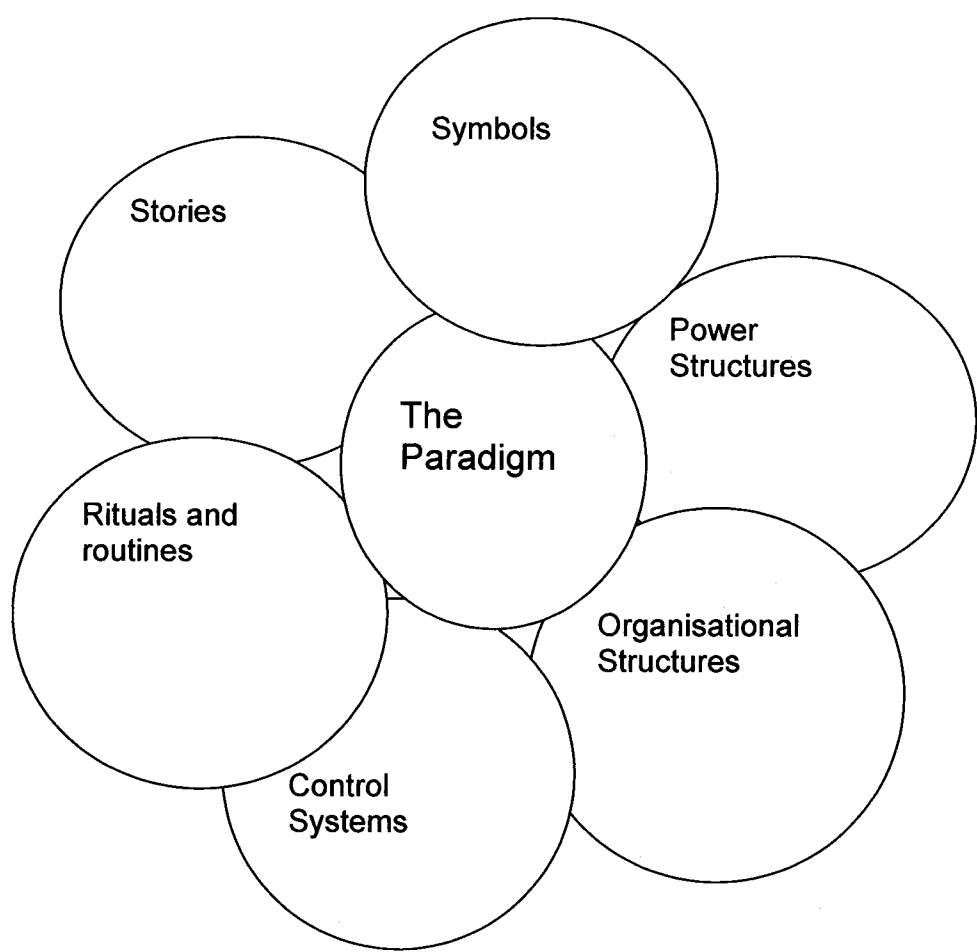


Figure 1. The Cultural Web

The cultural web is a representation is of the taken for granted assumptions, or paradigm of an organisation. The cultural web can be used for establishing the culture of different organisations and enable key issues against change to be identified.

However a key question is, should the state intervene? Should regulation be used to alter people's choices if as assumed that people will allocate their spending according to what they derive greatest pleasure, regardless of the consequences. The term 'nanny state' has been used by politicians and media to describe such interventionist policies as examples of the government meddling in the way people choose to live. It could be argued that the primary driver for such policies is primarily financial as Jotangia et al (2005) cite that the rise in childhood obesity was of particular concern as studies have shown that childhood and adolescent obesity can persist into adulthood where the health risks are more severe. Obesity is one of the risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The direct and indirect annual costs of treating obesity in the UK has been estimated at £3.3 – 3.7 billion (House of Commons Health Committee 2004)

### 2.13 Conceptual Model

The literature review has indicated that there are a number of organisations that are involved in service delivery, but there is consensual opinion amongst much research that a holistic approach is required for effective delivery. The review has identified issues from which a conceptual model can be used to summarises in an analytical format the strategic stages for service delivery and continuous improvement. The purpose of the conceptual model is to establish relationships between issues identified in the literature reviewed and establish relevance towards the purpose of this research.

The issues identified enable a broader analysis as well assessing the research question of operational impact of the scheme. Operational impact will be researched but what is evident from the literature review is that the primary driver, improving children's health, is complex and involves several agencies and stakeholders. A conceptual model will enable to identify the strategic fit of the scheme.

The delivery and implementation of a healthy lifestyle for children to embrace is a complex one for prospective stakeholders. Kanter et al (1992:508) argue that the first step to implementing change is coalition building. The health authority and local authorities are key partners for the deliver of the service, and if a holistic approach is to be embraced there has to be meaningful dialogue at the outset. Oxtoby, McGuinness and Morgan (2002), refer for a customised model approach and Dunphy and Stace (1993:905) argue that turbulent times demand different responses in varied circumstances... one that indicates how to vary

strategies to achieve optimum fit. Hence the first step in the conceptual model can be identified for by adopting holistic integrated partnerships involving key stakeholders as supported by Rutten et al (2003). The formulation of key partnerships that can pool resources and eliminate replication. Key stakeholders would include Local Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Governing Bodies and Education establishments.

Burnes (2004) cites that, successful change requires organisations to choose the most appropriate approach for their circumstances, or as emphasised to change their circumstances to accommodate their favoured approach. Sports Services have indicated that the primary driver for the introduction of the Futures Scheme is to improve the health of children and young people. From this stage 2, agree visions and values, and stage 3, adopt a mission statement, will clearly establish to stakeholders the intent and direction of LCC. Stage 4 is a situational analysis that would require extensive consultation with respective stakeholders to establish the scale of the problem to be addressed. Blake (2005) also argues for children to be involved in the decision making process, stage 5.

Graetz (2000), argues that the primary task of management today is the leadership of organisational change, and delivering healthy and active options for children requires a or change agent, to transcend organisational politics and consider an integrated approach. If Sports Services adopted the role of 'change agent' it would enable the formulation of strategy, stage 6.

From strategy formulation goals and objectives can be established, stage 7. Cale and Harris, (2001), cite that their updated recommendations are: realistic, have and emphasis on enjoyment, are relevant and flexible, and have a focus on different types of fitness and furthermore a holistic approach is required for health promotion and to develop and work in partnerships for successful delivery. The Chief Medicals officer (UK) recommends the benefits of exercise can only be achieved for children to partaking in 3 hours of exercise or activity outside of school hours.

The stages within the model are primarily concerned with mainstream delivery but here is a consensus that there is an interventionist aspect to be considered. Social benefits cited by 'Game Plan 2002' include crime reduction indicating that there is a widely held view that sport can have value as part of a package of measures to tackle crime, stage 9. Stage 10, measurable outcomes, are required to establish the viability of the adopted model, and would be fed back from local level to strategic level in the form of PI's.

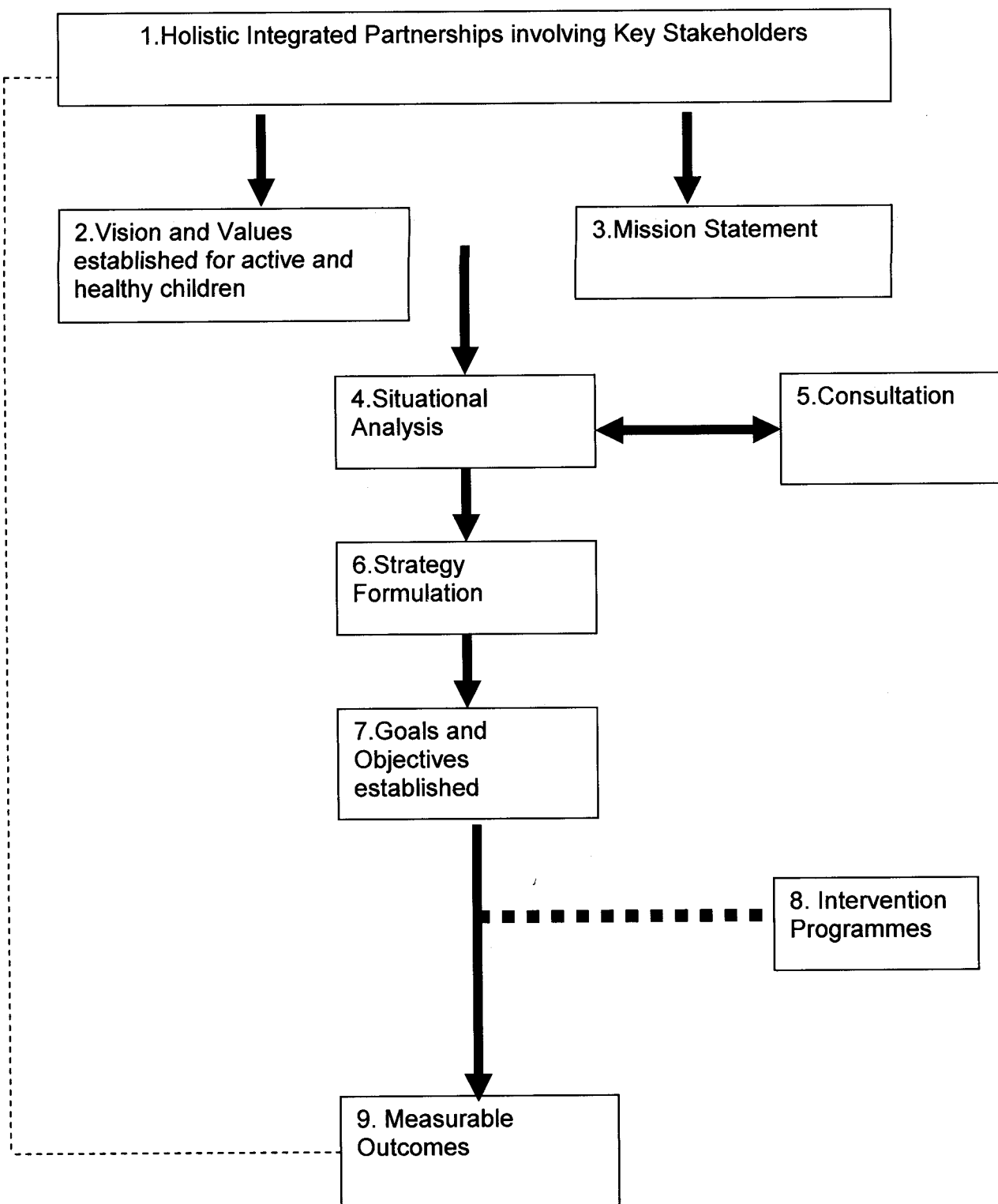


Figure 2. Conceptual Model

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

There are a variety of methodologies that can be adopted for undertaking of a research project. The choice of methodology will be influenced by nature of the subject, but also the beliefs and principles of the researcher. Research methods are the methods used by researchers on a project or field to provide knowledge of the subject under investigation and research strategies considered included:

- Action research
- Interviewing
- Statistical collation
- Experimental research
- Theoretical and scenario building
- Historical analysis
- Comparative studies
- Survey
- Grounded Theory
- Conceptual analysis

The conceptual model constructed in chapter two (Figure 2) based on findings from the literature review was considered when considering areas to explore to research and methodologies to be considered.

Business and management systems are rarely simple and the impact of the Futures Scheme for LCC was no exception. To compound the complexity of the project is the ‘operational’ position of the researcher and care would have to be taken to reduce undue influence. However it could be argued that the hermeneutical stance of the researcher as knowledgeable and enthusiastic stakeholder within the project could be advantageous. However there also remains the influence of the world on the human mind that may or may not be known to the researcher and this is argued by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2003). They refer to this concept as realism as they cite...there are large-scale social forces and

processes that affect people without their necessarily being aware of the existence of such influences.

Each research project will be unique and for methodologies to be considered a researcher must consider their basic assumptions. For the purposes of this paper the two fundamental basic assumptions were considered, that of one's ontological and epistemological stance. The approaches of each philosophy are further influenced by a researcher's basic assumptions. The fundamental to be considered are that of ontology and epistemology.

### 3.1.1 Ontology

Ontology can be defined as the nature of being or perhaps from a practical sense, what counts as an event worth noticing. The dilemma for the researcher is what is considered as noticeable data? The answer to this lies in what the researcher is trying to achieve and can be described as their ontological position. The research question must remain as the driver for the collection of data so that a systematic approach can be used to decide what research is relevant and what research is not.

Ontology can be considered as a reality and for the purposes of this paper this can be considered as actual occurrences, opinions, and perceptions. Although for research purposes care would have to be taken to not confuse perceptions as reality.

To consider this further it is important to return to the research question and consider the key elements within:

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The key elements identified included: Strategy, Operations, Change, and Sports Facilities. Although the 'range' appears wide and far reaching it is difficult to isolate elements in their entirety due to the nature of the subject being considered. It was considered that the people and processes were intrinsically linked.

### 3.1.2. Epistemology

Epistemology refers to beliefs about how knowledge is construed, and is about ones personal theory of knowing. In the case of this paper this is about what is disseminated from the research and considered as relevant for the purposes of the conceptual analysis.

Essentially it will relate to evidence to support findings and conclusions.

From a researchers point of this view this may be considered to be more contentious due to sub conscious influences and external influences that one may or may not be aware. One such influence is that of the relationship between the researcher and his employer and it would be important to ensure that this relationship did not influence or skew findings and conclusions.

Having considered the fundamental basic assumptions research philosophies and principles are to be considered to assess the most appropriate choice of methodologies?

### 3.1.3. Research philosophies and principles

There are two principle research philosophies that influence the choice of research methodology:

- Positivism whereby data is assimilated by adopting a quantitative strategy. This 'traditional' method favours a scientific approach, collating data in an objective and standardised way
- Interpretivism that conversely supports the use of qualitative methods that analyses dialogue and description.

However the philosophy or paradigm of methodology continues, as cited by Eldabi et al (2002), ...there is no 'perfect' research methodology, as there is no agreed methodology.

This is because there is still great debate about the meaning of science (Lee, 1989).

Naslund, (2002) cites that paradigm is our world-view, the lenses through which we see the world, as he argues 'people view the world differently'.

#### 3.1.4 Positivism and Interpretivism

The positivism approach favours the collection of independent facts and predominates in a scientific background. This approach involves the researcher to be objective and removed from its subject and research methodologies are dominated by quantitative techniques.

However there is criticism of the positivism approach as argued by Jankowicz (2005) citing that in organisational work those different ontological and epistemological principles apply. Eldabi et al, (2002), argue that positivism demands an absolute level of generalisation and it relies on measurable evidence and therefore influences a high degree of control over the phenomenon. Bryman (1993) criticises quantitative research methods for their apparent orderliness and linearity, and their lack of concern over the influence of resource constraints.

The interpretivism approach or sometimes described as the phenomenological approach which considers the business environment to be too complex for research to embrace the positivism methodology and favours qualitative techniques. Arguing for this and cited by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2004) the interpretivist could mount is the necessity to discover what Remenyi et al. (1998:35) call 'the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps the reality working behind them'. The approach analyses results and explores interpretations and does not accept findings as simple fact.

Qualitative and quantitative data serve a purpose with researchers increasingly collecting data from multiple sources and perspectives, using a variety of data collection methods, thus allowing for a more complete representation of the problem under interrogation, Taylor-Powell, (1996) and Curran et al, (1998). Issues to be considered for methodological choices will include the availability of the data and therefore the credibility of the findings.

Quantitative researchers favour the scientific approach, perceiving complete objectivity of evaluation whereby standardised approaches are of the utmost importance. The alternative dialogical approach favours the use of qualitative methods, perceived as subjective, whereby dialogue, description and interpretation take precedence over measurement.



In spite of a researcher’s philosophical stance other considerations will include resources and the proposed time scale of the project, but perhaps most importantly is the relevance of utilisation that the findings will offer. Patton (1999:19) argues that no matter how rigorous the methods of data collection, design and reporting are in evaluation, if it does not get used it is bad evaluation.

The contrasting philosophies of positivism and interpretivism are summarised in table 3

Positivism philosophy	Interpretivism philosophy
1.Quantitative – accumulating data that can be measured numerically	1.Qualitative – collects people’s experiences and opinions to form conclusions
2. Objective. No bias or subjective research	2.Subjective – personal opinion
3.Scientific – a systematic approach involving observation and experimentation	3.Humanistic – collecting thought processes
4.Experimental – testing a hypothesis for association or relationship between variables	4. Interpretation – attempts to understand the findings of participants

Table 3. Positivism and Interpretivism Philosophies

The philosophies highlighted in table 3 were considered as viable and achievable methodologies that could be applied to the research question as a ‘hybrid’ approach of the respective paradigms. This was considered to be a balanced approach to maximise the opportunity for meaningful results. However despite the ongoing debate regarding research philosophies the researcher must also consider the availability and type of data and ensure that adopt methods will have the ‘correct fit’ to reach meaningful conclusions. The ‘hybrid’ or ‘family’ approach of using several different research methods can be described as triangulation.

### 3.2 Methodology Applied

The purpose of the research is to analyse the impact of the introduction of the Futures Scheme to the City of Liverpool. The scheme required a change of processes to be introduced to Sports Services and the research would explore emergent issues and identify 'gaps' in strategy and operations. Research was problematic and complex due to the range and profile of stakeholders involved and yet adopted methods must be pragmatic, achievable within a specified time scale and cost effective.

The methodology applied is to adopt complementary methods in an attempt to verify findings, acknowledging the weaknesses of different research techniques, and that adopting one type of assimilating data may be flawed. Triangulation is a technique that adopts several different methodologies to study the same subject or question. The appeal of this approach is that there is an acknowledgement of weaknesses of a single approach and that a balanced approach is likely to have supported conclusions. It also enables different questions to be explored that will require contrasting methodologies. As argued by Jack and Raturi (2006) the point at which the perspectives converge is seen to represent reality. From an organisational perspective the decision to introduce the Futures Scheme was a top-down decision and the research will explore impact from other stakeholder's viewpoints, including participants.

Triangulation combines several research methodologies to study the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1970) and receives support from Jack and Raturi (2006) that complementary methods are deployed under the assumption that weaknesses inherent in one approach will be counterbalanced via strengths in another. The point that each research strategy meets is considered to be reality. This technique could provide more stimulating and interesting findings as the combination of methodologies can provide richness in detail than one type of philosophy could produce.

Support for the pursuit of realism can be found from Healy and Perry (2000) who advocate a multi methodological approach as they cite that realism is neither value-laden nor value free, realism researchers are value-aware. The pursuit of the research issue in this paper is 'live' at the time of writing and continues to evolve, however the pursuit of realism will endeavour to establish the value Futures Scheme using contrasting methods combined to establish actuality.

The principles of the Futures Scheme, free access to sports facilities for children, are not unique in local government in the United Kingdom (UK). Other local authorities have similar schemes with the first one being Glasgow City Council. This presented an opportunity for the research to include a case study and allow the concepts being researched to be investigated in a reality environment. The case study of Glasgow City Council brings an additional dimension to the research from which LCC can benefit.

Figure 3 illustrates a model of the adopted methodologies.

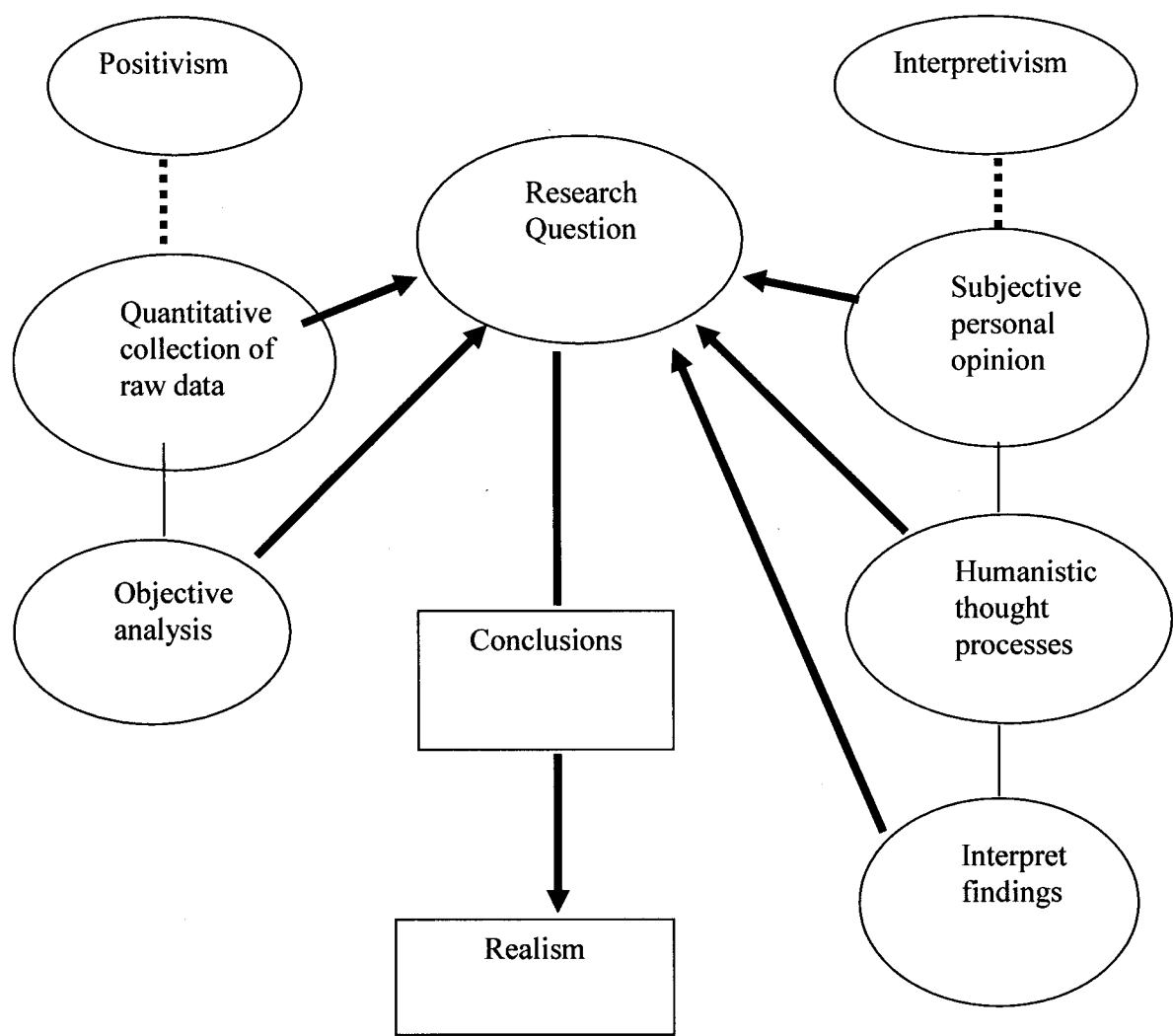


Figure 3. Model of Adopted Methodologies

### 3.3 Data Collection Process

#### 3.3.1 Management Information System

Data that could be measured numerically was collected from the City of Liverpool's management information system (MIS). The longitudinal approach assessed and collected data prior to and during the Futures Scheme.

Trends of sport usage by children and young persons were researched by analysing sports services MIS. Usage was analysed for the first six months of the scheme and the corresponding calendar months from the previous year prior to the introduction of the scheme. The MIS of Sports Services however was extremely limited and the statistics extrapolated for this research was a time consuming a lengthy process.

To assess the uses of data, information and knowledge in Sports Services each respective term can be defined as follows:

- Data consists of facts devoid of meaning or intent, where meaning and intent are supplied by a particular use, Sprauge and McNurlin (1993)
- Information is data in context, which means the data has been given an explicit meaning in a specific context, Sprauge and McNurlin (1993)
- Knowledge is information with direction or intent, where intent is derived from strategies or objectives, Sprauge and McNurlin (1993)

Attempts to capture 'knowledge' in computer systems continue. But for some experts and researchers in the field, knowledge is not something that can be captured in a machine; it can only exist inside a person's head. Sprauge and McNurlin (1993) Due to the increasing emphasis on knowledge, it is now called 'intellectual capital' by some to distinguish it from other kinds of capital that firms possess, Sprauge and McNurlin (1993). Extensive analysis was conducted to examine the statistics of Sports Service's MIS and presented as meaningful information within this research.

#### 3.3.2 Case Study

Emails were sent to four local authorities outlining the nature of the research and requesting if key personnel would be willing to be interviewed regarding the impact of introducing free

swimming to their respective departments. The authorities contacted included Birmingham, Glasgow, Wigan and Wrexham. The correspondence was followed up telecom and two authorities agreed to provide information and to be interviewed, Glasgow and Wigan.

### 3.3.3 Lifestyles Ex-Members Qualitative Research

In October 2006, Sports Services commissioned LCC's Market Research Unit to conduct research to explore issues as to why customer's terminated their membership with Sports Services. The Unit contacted ex members from Sports Services and invited them to focus group sessions in an informal setting. The subsequent report provided information from 'non users' of the Futures Scheme but more importantly they shared the same environment as participants of the Futures Scheme.

### 3.3.4 Future Lifestyles Qualitative Research

Between January and March 2007 after consultation with Sports Services senior management team commissioned LCC's Market Research Unit for qualitative research regarding the Futures Scheme. After discussions the methodology chosen was that of peer sessions. Peer sessions involve recruiting one person and asking they nominate one or two friends to take part in an interview with them. This approach was considered to be the most effective at meeting the objectives as children would gain security from the presence of a friend in taking part in an interview.

The unit were advised by the researcher of the most appropriate leisure venues likely to receive a positive response and assistance was provided in the facilitating of the research. Due to the wide range of the Futures Scheme, eight to seventeen years, it was decided to categorise the peer sessions by age and gender to enhance and validate responses. Age groups were 8 to 11 year olds, 12 to 14 year olds, and 15 to 17 year olds.

### 3.3.5 Case Study – Glasgow City Council.

Glasgow City Council (GCC) launched a free swimming scheme for children at its swimming pools in April 2001. A contact was established by consulting a member of LCC's senior management team regarding the scheme. An email was sent to the contact at GCC stating the purpose of the research that was being conducted. The email was

subsequently followed up by telecom and invitation to Glasgow to elicit further information was issued and accepted. Information was obtained by giving access to documents and a semi-structured interview where notes were taken. (Appendix 10).

#### 3.3.6 Wigan Council

Wigan Council has a similar scheme to that of the Futures Scheme that was launched in 2003. An email was sent to the Council's web site requesting for an appropriate contact to discuss the scheme and a contact was established within Wigan Council's Leisure Trust who are responsible for managing their leisure services. Contact was subsequently made by telecom whereby an invitation to meet was accepted to discuss the scheme in Wigan. Information was provided in a semi-structured interview (Appendix 1) but supporting documentation was not provided. Regrettably not enough information could be elicited to warrant as a case study. However due to the nature of the responses and the similar theme that matched interviews in LCC the information obtained is included in this report.

#### 3.3.7 Manager's Interviews

Interviews were conducted with managers of sports services (Appendices 2 to 6). An interview was also conducted with a senior member of the Active City Strategy Group (Appendix 11) to give the research a balance by gaining valued opinion of a senior health professional that was operating at a strategic level. Each interview was analysed for common themes that would be taken into focus groups of front line staff involved in delivering the Futures Scheme.

#### 3.3.8 Focus group format - staff

The focus group format was used to seek the opinions of front line staff. The focus groups were selected from three of the larger leisure centres: Ellergreen Leisure Centre, Everton Park Sports Centre, and Peter Lloyd Leisure Centre. Notes were taken at each focus group (Appendices 7 – 9). Each of the centres are situated in the heart of their respective communities and are popular sites to visit. The focus group composed a cross section of designations: fitness instructors, recreation attendants, and recreation attendants.

### 3.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues for a research project must be considered prior to the commencement of the project and adhered to throughout. This is regardless of methodologies applied or philosophical viewpoint. It is essential to observe and acknowledge the rights of participants.

Integrity and honesty are essential ingredients for collecting data and are especially important using qualitative techniques that involve the interpretation of participant's opinions and viewpoints. The transparency of the researcher's motives must be clearly understood by all willing participants.

Participants for this paper were assured that their responses would be confidential and this was reassurance was not only essential but was welcomed by front line staff in semi structured focus groups. This actually prompted replies that otherwise may not have.

The rights of participants were assured with the following key points observed:

- All contributors are informed they are participating voluntarily
- The purpose of the research and the research question is shared with all participants
- Contributors may withdraw from the process at any stage if they wish to do so with no obligation to provide an explanation.
- Assurances will be provided and observed concerning confidentiality, anonymity and privacy.
- All contributors will be treated fairly and respect by the researcher.

It was made clear that the research could not move deviate from its stated intent and assurances were made regarding ulterior motives

### 3.5 Limitations

There have been limitations on the research conducted. There have been difficulties in co-ordinating focus groups of front line staff and ideally data should have been collected from larger numbers. Regrettably due to operational constraints, making front line staff available, there were difficulties encountered. Secondary data analysed on Sports Services MIS was limited due to the lack of detail and incompatibility with other software.

### 3.6 Rejected Methods

Chadwick et al. (1984) have identified a number of misgivings in using scientific observation, which forms the basis of many quantitative research methods. This includes the inability of researchers to observe something without changing it. It was considered inappropriate to consider observation as a research method, not only due to the researcher's position in the organisation as a senior facility manager, but also it was impractical. Observing front line staff in their working environment could have influenced their behaviour away from the norm and hence devalued the findings.

Questionnaires were also considered for front line staff however this was also rejected for the principal reason of communication processes within the organisation. Most of the staff involved in the Futures Scheme do not have access to a computer and are therefore cut off from the electronic network within the organisation. The leisure centres and swimming pools are spread over a large area of the city of Liverpool and it was considered as too difficult to obtain valid information from staff, many of which work evenings and weekends. It was also considered that staff would have discussed their responses within their own teams and therefore removing the independent responses that were desired.

### 3.7 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methods, qualitative and quantitative, for collecting information and fundamental research philosophies have been debated. The basic principles relating to research have been briefly debated with the researcher considering his ontological and epistemological position. Explanations have been provided for the chosen approaches with a case put forward for the triangulation or combination of methods.

Patterns and correlations have been checked and comparisons have been made with another similar local authority. Limitations, operational and practical, have been outlined and a brief explanation for rejected methods has been provided.

Ethical issues for the researcher have been discussed together with assurances regarding techniques for conducting research



## **4. Analysis of Data**

### **4.1 Introduction**

For the purpose of the research secondary data was available from Sports Services MIS. The quantitative data available, in the form of user group attendances, allowed a longitudinal approach. Data was analysed from the MIS for the first six months of the Futures Scheme, 1st May 2006 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006. Data was also analysed for the corresponding months in 2005.

Secondary data was also available from customer focus groups involving adult members who no longer used Sports Services of LCC. However as a result of this research, further research was commissioned by LCC to obtain the views of participants of the Futures scheme, namely children and young persons.

Other local authorities have implemented similar schemes to that of LCC's Futures Scheme and interviews were conducted in Glasgow and Wigan with key personnel associated with their respective schemes. The information obtained from Glasgow was suitably comprehensive to present a case study of the findings. The information obtained from Wigan was not as comprehensive, but was considered relevant to be included in open coding technique for analysis of similar themes with key personnel in LCC.

Interviews were conducted with a wide range of managers to investigate the impact of the implementation of the Futures Scheme. The interviews were semi structured and themes that had been identified from the case study were introduced and discussed.

To ensure that the operational impact was researched with broad base, staff focus groups were formed at three separate sites involving different designations: supervisors, fitness instructors, reception staff, and attendant/lifeguards.

### **4.2 Case Study – Glasgow**

The city of Glasgow has the highest level of poverty and deprivation and the worst health status of any city in Scotland. The poverty and health indicators for Glasgow as detailed by Glasgow City Council are:

- Glasgow has 41% of the most deprived wards in Scotland

- One in three people live in poverty compared to one in eight in Scotland
- 42 % of those under the age of 16 years live in households dependent on income support
- 41% of school pupils are entitled to free school meals, more than double the Scottish average of 18.8%
- 42% of all deaths in Glasgow can be attributed to heart disease
- Health care in Greater Glasgow is £878 million.

The summarised performance indicators (PI) were cited by Glasgow City Council as the drivers for the launch of the city’s juvenile free swimming scheme. Glasgow was the first UK authority to introduce unlimited access to swimming and was perceived as an innovative approach to tackling social inclusion, health, and community safety. Swimming was chosen as a free activity by Glasgow for the following reasons:

- It is considered to be a good and social activity that can be done either alone or with friends.
- It would be a popular alternative to computer games and watching television
- The activity is in a safe and supervised environment

However, Glasgow was also experiencing a decline in juvenile swimming attendances that was also a national trend. Details of swimming attendances in Glasgow are in table 4.

Fiscal Year	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00
Swimming Attendances	282,031	269,339	258,441

Table 4. Glasgow Swimming Attendances

The juvenile free swimming initiative was launched in Glasgow in April 2001 and received considerable favourable media coverage in the national and local press and TV coverage by the BBC and STV. The scheme initially proved to be extremely popular and during the first 12 months of the scheme there was a 123% increase in juvenile swimming attendances, table 5

Fiscal Year	2000/2001	2001/2002	%age increase
Juvenile Swimming Attendances	238,668	531,665	123

Table 5 Glasgow Juvenile Swimming Attendances, 2000 - 2002

The biggest increases were experienced in areas that have considerable deprivation, high levels of unemployment and having some of the poorest health records and were designated as social inclusion partnership areas. The council’s ongoing market research programme indicated that the usage of the facilities was predominantly that of the local people and was benefiting the children that the initiative is aimed at.

The reaction of the displaced users, predominantly adults, was mixed. There was a consensus that the principles for free swimming for children were worthwhile. There was also frustration that they were no longer able to enjoy their swimming due to the pools being full to capacity.

Glasgow reacted by introducing sessions to satisfy the demand for swimming by children. The swimming pool programmes were also reviewed and adult lane swimming and family only sessions were implemented.

#### 4.2.1 Operational Issues

The staffing levels had to be introduced so that staff ratio to bathers was maintained at levels that would ensure safe supervision and control of children. Extra cleaning was required and there were indications that staff were complaining of stress with the pools being full to capacity for long periods. There was an increase in utility charges especially water. The increased attendances resulted in the number of backwashes for swimming pools to be increased considerably. This was to comply with recommendations that 30 litres of water per bather per day is replaced.

4.2.2 Management Information System (MIS)

Glasgow’s MIS has not been able to capture all of the desired information. The MIS was not suitably robust at the point of entry as it is estimated that 30% of cards were not being read accurately. As a result Glasgow has updated its smart card technology to capture mote meaningful and robust information that will also be useful when competing for funding. There is a concession by Glasgow’s Cultural and Leisure Services that there is increasing pressure to demonstrate the impact that their service is having on people’s lives. The MIS will now record the number of actual individuals; the activities that they participate in; the frequency of participation; in addition to profiling users in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, and postcode address. The Cultural and Leisure Services of Glasgow intend to analyse this information so that resources can be targeted more effectively at juveniles that are currently not using the leisure facilities.

4.2.3 Glasgow Juvenile Swimming Usage – Summary

Glasgow’s juvenile free swim initiative was introduced in April 2001 and despite the initial popularity of the scheme there has been a significant reduction in attendances in subsequent years as detailed in table 6.

Fiscal Year	Juvenile Swimming Attendances
2000/2001	238,668
2001/2002	531,665
2002/2003	370,052
2003/2004	321,172

Table 6. Glasgow Juvenile Swimming Attendances, 2000 – 2004.

The reduction in attendances can be attributed to a number of closures and refurbishment of facilities but there is a concession that the scheme is not as popular as it was when it was first launched. There were problems with the MIS, but there were also problems with the distribution of the smart card that allowed juveniles to access the scheme. However there is still an increase in overall attendances of juveniles swimming prior to the scheme was launched. The free swimming scheme has also been supported by free coaching activities

for children during the school holidays for children aged between the ages of eight and fourteen years. Glasgow also cites that the scheme has also contributed in part to an increase in the overall attendances of its leisure facilities as detailed in table 7.

Fiscal Year	Overall Attendances
2000/2001	2,730,352
2001/2002	3,495,254
2002/2003	3,400,602
2003/2004	3,663,669

Table 7. Glasgow Swimming Attendances 2000 – 2004.

The increase in overall attendances is considered as the reason for the 25% increase in catering and vending income.

4.3 Focus Groups Staff

A qualitative approach was used to explore the perceptions of front line staff on the impact of the Future Scheme. Each focus group comprised of a cross section of designations and included supervisors, reception staff, fitness instructors, and recreation attendants.

Data was assimilated at three different sites that would reflect the range of leisure facilities provided by Liverpool City Council. A summary of Liverpool City Council’s leisure facilities are summarised in table 8.

Facility	Location	Wet	Dry	Outdoor
Beechley Riding Stables	Allerton			x
Austin Rawlinson	Speke	X	x	X
Cardinal Heenan	Broadgreen		X	
Everton Park	Everton	X	x	X
Croxteth Sports Centre	Croxteth		X	
Garston Sports Centre	Garston	x	x	X
Millennium	City		x	
Park Road	Dingle	x	x	X
Peter Lloyd	West Derby	x	X	
Toxteth	Toxteth		x	X
Wavertree Tennis	Wavertree		x	x
Newhall		X		
Wavertree Athletics Centre				X
Woolton		x		

Table 8. Liverpool City Council Leisure Facilities Summary.

The facilities selected for focus groups included:

- Peter Lloyd Leisure Centre

This site has a favourable location and as a consequence the leisure pool is extremely popular as is its classes and other activities.

- Ellergreen

Opened in 2001 with the aid of lottery funding this centre is popular despite its location in a deprived area of north Liverpool.

- Everton Park Sports Centre

Located approximately one mile from the city centre, it attracts many special events due to its spectator capacity, such as swimming galas and televised boxing. It has an eight-lane swimming pool that makes it an important venue for competitive swimming on a regional basis.

#### 4.3.1 Findings

There were a number of recurrent themes that emerged from the respective focus groups and this included: stress, customer issues, weight and obesity issues, and scheme structure.

#### 4.3.2 Stress

Stress was cited by many as an issue in anticipation of the scheme and once the scheme had been launched: *'It was very stressful on the pool, it was full to capacity and the kids would not behave...'* (Recreation attendant/lifeguard);

*'It was stressful. It felt like we had been hit with a sledgehammer and that we had no authority.'* (Supervisor)

The reasons for the stress were cited as being the sudden increase in the number of visits to leisure sites. The increase in numbers and a corresponding deterioration in the behaviour of children and young persons were cited as the main cause of stress although the frustration of displaced customers was also mentioned by some.

#### 4.3.3 Customer Issues

There were a number of issues relating to customer's reactions and behaviour to the Futures Scheme. The displaced customers indicated frustration and new customers, young people and children, were challenging.

*'Existing adults were feeling displaced and there should have been designated entry times, sessions. Adult and direct debit holders just got pushed to one side'* (Receptionist)

*'The girls were generally badly behaved, some shocking behaviour, foul mouthed and they just encouraged the boys to act the fool and they do...'* (Recreation Attendant)

#### 4.3.4 Weight and Activity Issues

There was a general consensus from the focus groups regarding weight and activity.

*'We know about getting kid's active and attracting younger user...' (Fitness Instructor)*

*'I know why Futures has been introduced. There is obesity stuff and health issues all over the media' (Supervisor)*

#### 4.3.5 Scheme Structure

There was criticism regarding the scheme structure but also similar suggestions regarding how the scheme can be improved.

#### 4.3.6 Criticisms

*'Passing the forms out to the schools was a complete waste of time...it was just poor communication' (Receptionist)*

*'The cards were an absolute nightmare. They (the children) were suppose to turn up with cards and they didn't...we just couldn't cope. It just made us look stupid' (Supervisor)*

#### 4.3.7 Improvements

*'I think the scheme has now lost its way and we need structured sessions. More diversity and choice needed. Allowing access to the pool and just messing about is not really exercise, they need more' (Supervisor)*

*A lot of the time they are just messing about and it isn't really exercise. We should give them more structure with classes. Girls could go in aerobic classes with their mums but classes for children should be shorter as they get bored' (Fitness Instructor)*

#### 4.3.8 Vending Machines

There was awareness within the focus groups regarding exercise and health but there were also observations that the leisure facilities were sending mixed signals to children regarding health.

*'What about vending machines? We can't say to children, do this and do that, it's good for you, when we have our machines full of rubbish. That doesn't make sense' (Fitness Instructor)*



*'...more spending in the vending machines but we're supposed to be promoting health and fitness, that doesn't make sense. I think it is a poor choice of vending especially when we tell the children about five vegetables and fruit a day. It's a contradiction' (Supervisor)*

#### 4.3.9 Focus Group Staff Summary

The consensus from the focus groups was that the scheme was well intentioned but that it was rushed and that they felt ill prepared. This manifested itself in expressions of stress and frustration, particularly with the behaviour of children and expressions of dissatisfaction by displaced customers.

There were also constructive comments on how the scheme could be improved and also observations that the popularity of the scheme was waning, however there was a general awareness regarding children's health and fitness.

#### 4.4 Focus Groups Children and Young Persons

Between January and March 2007 after consultation with Sports Services senior management team commissioned LCC's Market Research Unit for research regarding the Futures Scheme. Peer sessions were arranged involve recruiting one person and asking they nominate one or two friends to take part in an interview with them. Children were targeted by leisure staff who may be willing participants who were also rewarded with a Sports Voucher to the value of £20.00. This approach was considered to be the most effective at meeting the objectives as children would gain security from the presence of a friend in taking part in an interview.

Due to the wide range of the Futures Scheme, eight to seventeen years, it was decided to categorise the peer sessions by age and gender to enhance and validate responses. Age groups were 8 to 11 year olds, 12 to 14 year olds, and 15 to 17 year olds.

Significant recommendations arising from the consultation process include:

It is recommended that the issues raised in the consultation are given due consideration and the following recommendations developed:

##### 4.4.1 Improvements to Leisure Centres:

- Increase the range of healthy eating options within Vending machines.
- Look to have more floats and slides etc in swimming pools.

- Continue to work to improve the cleanliness of facilities.
- Look to provide more private shower cubicles when re-furbishing changing facilities.

#### 4.4.2 Safety:

- Staff should be aware of how to spot signs of bullying and how to deal with it.
- Safety of areas around leisure centres is an issue that requires further investigation by Leisure Services, Regeneration and Community Safety.

#### 4.4.3 Activities Available:

- Promoting what is already available at centres through schools and within the centres themselves to existing members.
- Providing more clubs's and classes for children and young people.
- Opening up the age requirements for adult classes to encourage more young people to take part.

#### 4.4.4. Encouraging other children and young people to attend:

- Opening the women's gym earlier and promoting it to encourage more girls's to attend and exercise.
- Re-visiting the distribution of leaflets and application forms for new members through schools.
- Providing more information and doing more to publicise what is available in the centres and how to access these activities to children and young people.
- Looking at ways in which Future Lifestyles members can access the gym and other facilities at different times.
- Using marketing to encourage young girl's to take part in more organised activities and to develop a more positive attitude towards exercise and the leisure elements.
- Investigation options for promoting the centres as somewhere that young people can spend time with friends.

#### 4.4.5. Other recommendations

- Encouraging Future Lifestyles members to bring along their parents or explore ways in which they can be used as a method of reaching and marketing membership to their parents.

#### 4.5 Lifestyles Ex-Members Qualitative Research

In October 2006, Sports Services commissioned LCC's Market Research Unit to conduct research to explore issues as to why customer's terminated their membership with Sports Services. The Unit contacted ex members from Sports Services and invited them to focus group sessions in an informal setting.

Relevant findings from this research process include:

Minimise the impact of the Futures Scheme by:

- Investigate options for limiting times that children can use the centres or for developing 'kid's' gyms or separate lanes within swimming pools.
- Additional supervision for 'kids'.

A particular quote from the report regarding the futures scheme was negative: *'The centre was over run with gangs of kids...I had kids about eight asking me how to use the equipment...I wanted to be able to work out, not be hassled by kids'*

#### 4.6 Interviews Leisure Managers

Interviews were conducted with a senior manager of Liverpool City Council with strategic responsibility, and senior facility managers. An interview was also conducted with a senior manager of Wigan Borough Council, who has operated a similar scheme for three years. For analysis purposes open coding has been adopted to categorise responses on common themes.

Table 9. Coding of Interviews

Interview	Statement	Coding
LCC1	There were stress issues for staff	Staff
	...a lot of existing users were displaced	Customers
	There was an increase in vending income but this raised concerns regarding unhealthy snacks from some	Vending
	...no increase in staffing costs, which may have posed the question as to whether we were over staffed.	Budget
	Operational costs increased particularly utility bills with the amount of backwashing required.	Budget
	...form filling and literacy has been flagged up as a barrier for some children to get onto the scheme and this should be the type of children that we need to be attracting to our sites	Scheme Structure
	The decline in casual swimming was the main reason [introduction of free swimming]	Drivers
	We have to do more outreach work and go out and attract the difficult to reach kids who might be up to no good	Outreach Work
LCC2	It had a negative on staff as they felt they were under undue pressure	Staff
	Other customers cancelled their memberships and because there were complaints we even had to waive	Customers

	<p>minimum cancellation period.</p> <p>Our secondary spend has gone up but our vending machines are full of fizzy drinks and crisps. It attracts criticism</p> <p>There was an impact on the budget with additional staff costs and problem users</p> <p>I think that it has had a limited impact and we should have had more resources for coaching classes. This would give it more structure and control.</p> <p>There was no consultation beforehand. There was a decision and we had to get on with it however there was no justification for not doing it. In principle it is a fantastic idea</p> <p>I understand why the scheme was introduced. The health and obesity issue is everywhere.</p> <p>I think it has had limited impact on children at risk, the difficult to reach group, and we would need to do more outreach work to do this</p> <p>We need to consult and find out what children like and don't like. A research questionnaire for years 4,5,6 would tell us what children want</p>	<p>Vending</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p> <p>Drivers</p> <p>Outreach Work</p> <p>Consultation</p>
LCC3	<p>The staff struggled at first and although no one said it, the staff looked more stressed.</p> <p>There were complaints on Radio Merseyside... Other users thought it was terrible and that the scheme was a glorified child minding service</p> <p>If we are going to change the way we do things we need to review our vending</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Vending</p>

	<p>I have budget concerns and I don't think that it has been fairly offset and has put us under even more pressure.</p> <p>There was no consultation and I don't think it was well thought through.</p> <p>There are obesity and health concerns for children. It's in the papers all the time or on the news. If something isn't done now we will be paying the health bill in 30 years time</p> <p>We worked more closely with health partners and the Youth Committee.</p>	<p>Budget</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p> <p>Drivers</p> <p>Outreach Work</p>
LCC4	<p>There was extra stress on the staff and some experienced a loss of confidence as they adapted to the scheme. Some of children were anti social and some had ASBO's and so it was tough on the staff.</p> <p>There was extra stress on the staff and some experienced a loss of confidence as they adapted to the scheme. Some of children were anti social and some had ASBO's and so it was tough on the staff.</p> <p>It had a bad effect on the gym; it took the atmosphere away from the gym as there were swarms of children. Adults were telling me that they come to the gym to get away from children, have their own space, but hey</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Customers</p>

	<p>were very unhappy</p> <p>Secondary spend would offset some of it but again are we sending mixed signals? We say health is a reason and then we make sure our vending machines are full of fatty snacks, sweets and crisps.</p> <p>Our budget was altered and our income targets were not adjusted realistically but it wasn't enough.</p> <p>Secondary spend would offset some...</p> <p>It was introduced far too quickly and was not consulted. It was just mentioned that it was on its way. The schools were used for issuing the schools but they weren't interested in getting behind it. Most of the children turned up without any details on the card. I was embarrassed.</p> <p>I think we should have poured some resources into recruiting coaches to help us cope and give more choice and structure, dance coaches, female football coaches, and fitness coaches is the way to go. If it is for health should we look at the 60 plus and let them in as well, as long as our budget and targets are adjusted.</p> <p>I know that obesity for children is a growing problem and that is one of the reasons behind this and if it is keeping children off the street crime in the area will go down</p>	<p>Vending</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p> <p>Drivers</p>
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	<p>We have got closer ties with partners as a result such as some youth workers who are based here that do outreach work although I would prefer if we managed them directly...</p>	<p>Outreach Work</p> <p>Consultation</p>
LCC5	<p>I know initially it will be frustrating for staff.</p> <p>There is undoubtedly an impact on other users. I'm fielding regular complaints from other customers that the centres are too busy and the children are out of control</p> <p>The DCMS want us to demonstrate that we are making an impact in communities and this is the best way.</p> <p>The vending has attracted some comments from the Echo</p> <p>There will be budget pressures but there always is but the change in direction allows us to show how valuable we are. The DCMS refer to secondary impact.</p> <p>There are key partners and this includes the Primary Care Trusts (PCT), Youth Services and schools</p> <p>There are national strategies that are driven by health agenda such as the health of the nation</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Driver</p> <p>Vending</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p> <p>Drivers</p>



	<p>The youth services have a role to play, especially the difficult kids but hey can assist with assessing what is best for them as well</p>	<p>Outreach Work Consultation</p>
LCC6	<p>It was causing facility managers a lot of problems and they had to react and change activity programmes</p> <p>I knew there was going to be an adverse reaction by some customers. It was inevitable. Adult swimmers were unhappy and they made complaints.</p> <p>Our budget is under pressure and we need more due to the increased attendances that we no longer receive income from. Operational costs did increase due to maintenance and increased staffing levels</p> <p>More resources are needed to develop and progress the scheme. Other providers can help the overall picture such as youth clubs.</p> <p>I imagine that the impact on health will be positive but this has not been measured and I don't have any information on the impacts on crime figures.</p> <p>However the scheme needs to develop and to strike a balance so that it has a fun element and not too prescriptive. We have fun in the pool sessions but structure in the gym, it need more consideration.</p>	<p>Staff</p> <p>Customers</p> <p>Budget</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p> <p>Drivers</p> <p>Scheme Structure</p>

#### 4.7 Interview Health Professional

To give the research some balance an interview was held with a health professional who was aware of the Futures Scheme. The interviewee has a strategic role as he is on the Executive Board for Active City Strategy in Liverpool. Unfortunately the interview was not as long as would have been hoped for but interesting observations from appendix included:

Ref: HP1 - *I think that from a customer expectation point of view there would be a structure to it. For example if I dropped my children off at a local leisure centre I would expect them to be welcomed by someone who was running the scheme.*

Ref: HP2 - *I think the price barrier may be more of a perceived barrier and some 'hand holding' is needed for some children.*

Ref: HP3 - *The schools have a role to play and I think there should be emphasis on competition.*

Although the interview was brief due to unavoidable circumstances the cited quotes resonate with open coding responses received from a cross section of leisure professionals.

#### 4.8 Secondary Data

Secondary data was available from Sports Services MIS that recorded the number of users at each respective leisure site. The MIS records users in groups that enable comparisons to be made of user trends prior to and during the initial period of the Futures Scheme. The two most popular activities of the Futures Scheme were swimming and Lifestyles gym usage. In comparison the take up of other activities was insignificant.

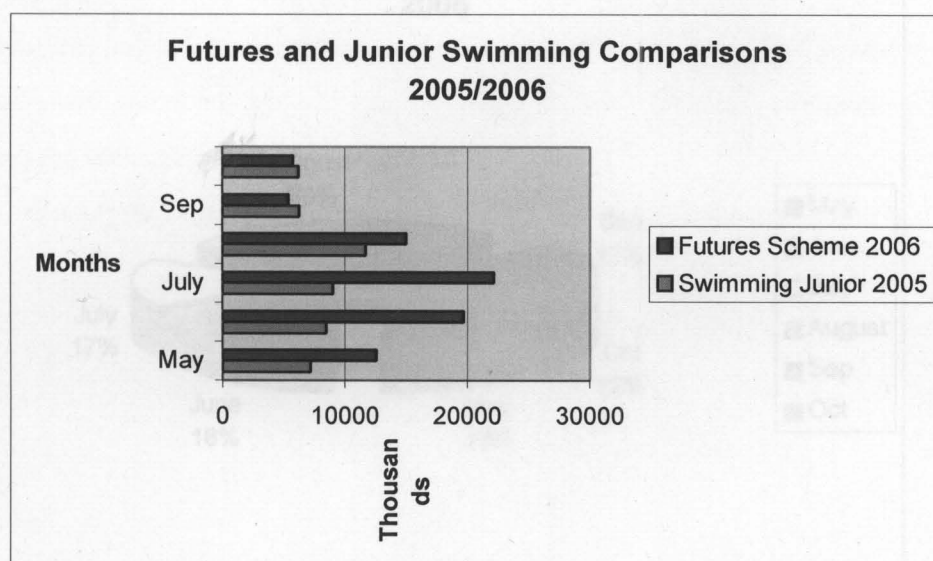
##### 4.8.1 Swimming

Due to the seasonal fluctuations of users trends were compared for the first six month of the Futures Scheme and the corresponding period from the previous year. Table 10 shows the swimming junior figures for all leisure sites for the period of May 2005 to October 2005 and the corresponding figures for the Futures Scheme in 2006.

There was an increase of total swims of 31664 which represents an increase of 39.3%. However despite the overall increase there was a sudden decline in the Futures Scheme attendances for the last two months of the period of comparison as can be seen in graph 1.

	May	June	July	August	Sep	Oct
Swimming Junior 2005	7200	8451	9043	11702	6274	6230
Futures Scheme 2006	12531	19699	22148	14996	5425	5765
Total						
May	7200				12531	
June		8451			19699	
July		9043			22148	
August		11702			14996	
Sep		6274			5425	
Oct		6230			5765	
Totals		48900			80564	

Table 10. Junior Attendances Comparisons 2005 - 2006



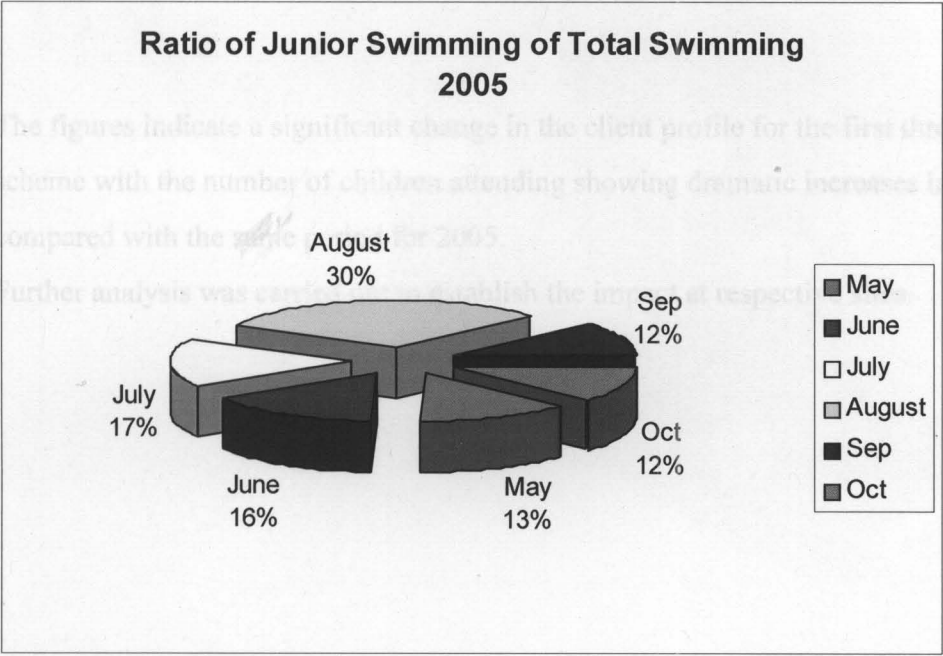
Graph 1. Futures and Junior Swimming Comparisons 2005/2006

The figures do indicate significant increases for the first four months of comparison but further analysis also indicates the changing profile of the customers by comparing the percentage of junior and future scheme swimmers with total number of swimmers. (Table 11)

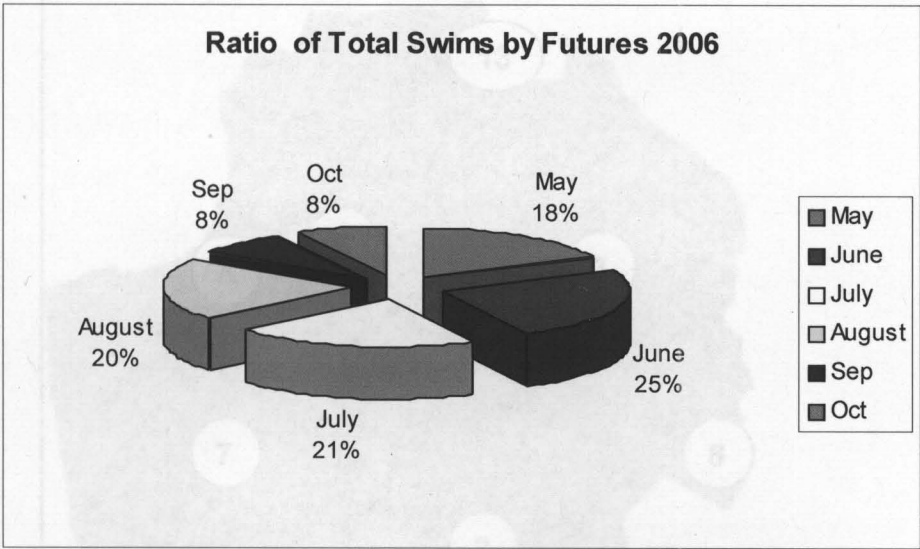
	May	June	July	August	Sep	Oct
Swimming Junior 2005	7200	8451	9043	11702	6274	6230
Futures Scheme 2006	12531	19699	22148	14996	5425	5765
Total Swims 2005	56332	56662	57218	40879	55395	54795
Total Swims 2006	5630	65957	84821	59658	54795	60324
Percentage of Total swim by Junior	12.78	14.94	15.8	28.63	11.33	11.39
Percentage of Total swim by Futures	22.23	29.87	26.11	25.14	9.9	9.56

Table 11. Swim attendances profiles 2005 and 2006.

Graph 3. Ratio of Futures swimming of total swimming 2006.



Graph 2. Ratio of Junior swimming of total swimming 2005.



Graph 3. Ratio of Futures swimming of total swimming 2006.

The figures indicate a significant change in the client profile for the first three months of the scheme with the number of children attending showing dramatic increases in 2006 when compared with the same period for 2005.

Further analysis was carried out to establish the impact at respective sites.

Figure 4. LCC Facility Locations

1. Garston Leisure Centre
2. Peter Lloyd Leisure Centre
3. Ellergreen
4. Millennium House Gym
5. Liverpool Tennis Centre and site of 50 metre pool development
6. Walton Sports Centre
7. Everton Park Sports Centre

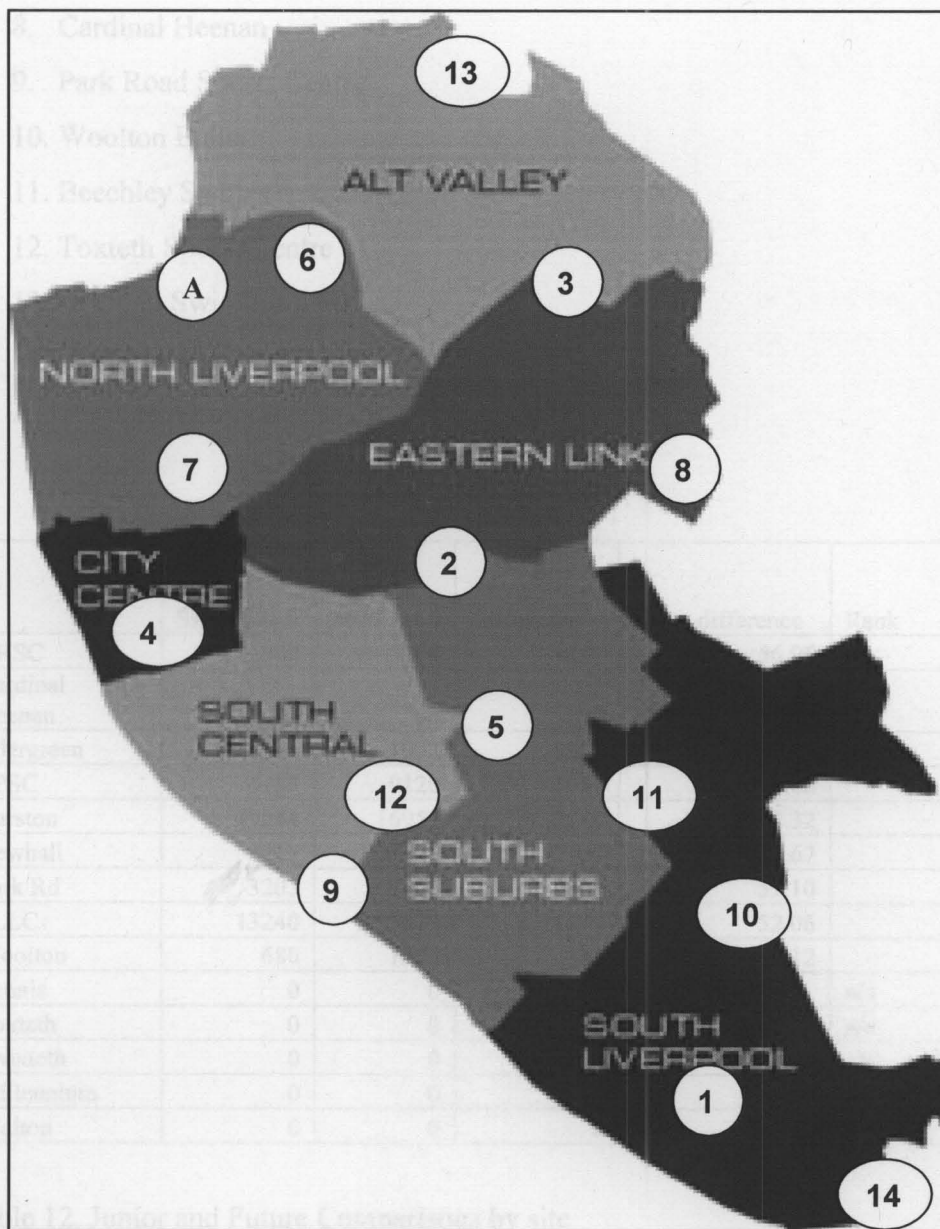


Figure 4. LCC Facility Locations

1. Garston Leisure Centre
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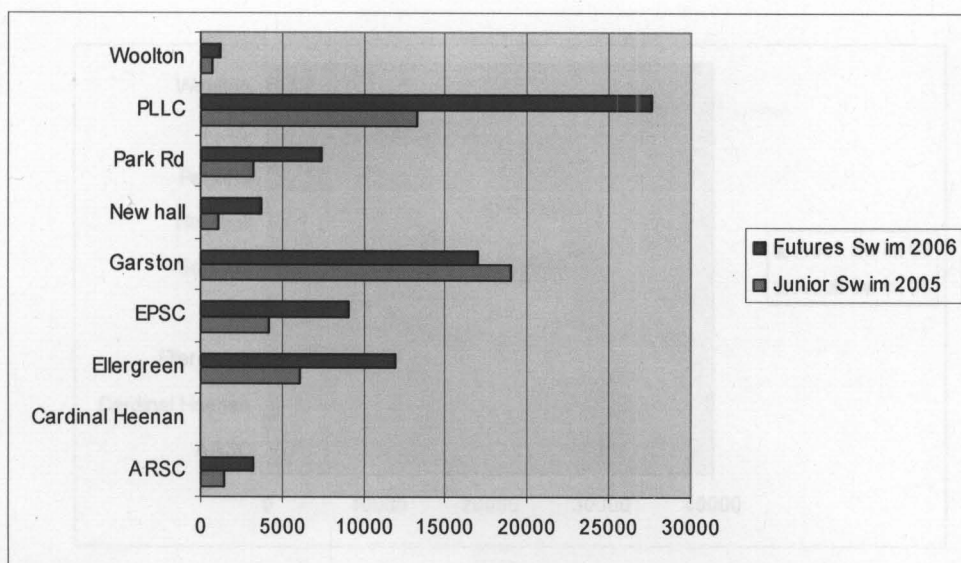


- 8. Cardinal Heenan
- 9. Park Road Sports Centre
- 10. Woolton Baths
- 11. Beechley Stables
- 12. Toxteth Sports Centre
- 13. Newhall Swimming Pool
- 14. Austin Rawlinson Sports Centre
- A. New site Alsop (Due to open Spring 2007)

	Junior Swim 2005	Futures Swim 2006	Difference	%age difference	Rank
ARSC	1392	3234	1842	56.96	5
Cardinal Heenan	63	98	35	35.71	8
Ellergreen	6108	11952	5844	48.90	6
EPSC	4153	9120	4967	54.46	3
Garston	19044	16955	-2089	-12.32	9
Newhall	1017	3721	2704	72.67	1
Park Rd	3203	7466	4263	57.10	2
PLLC	13240	27619	14379	52.06	4
Woolton	680	1239	559	45.12	7
Tennis	0	0	0		n/a
Toxteth	0	0	0		n/a
Croxteth	0	0	0		n/a
Millennium	0	0	0		n/a
Walton	0	0	0		n/a

Table 12. Junior and Future Comparisons by site

There are significant increases at all swimming pools with the exception of Garston Leisure Centre that actually indicates a significant reduction of 12.32%. Details of the findings are also presented in graphical form (Graph 4)



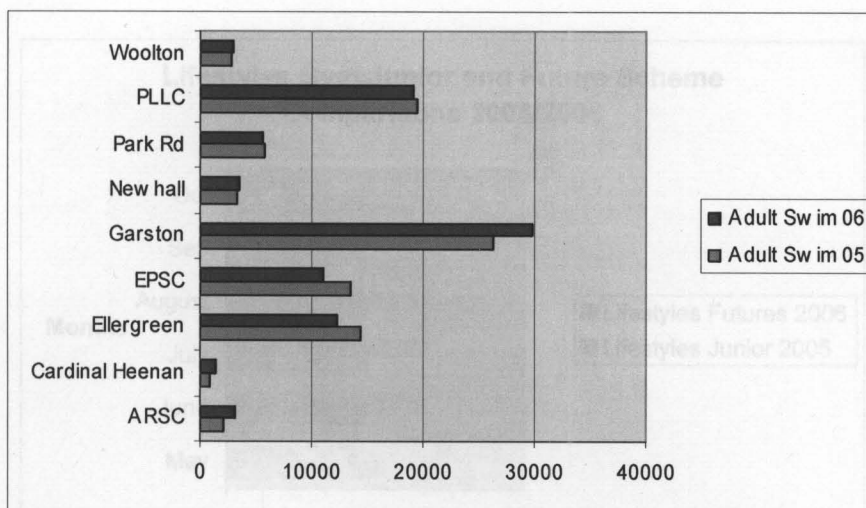
Graph 4. Futures and Junior Swims by Site 2005 and 2006.

Further analysis reveals the impact of the Futures Scheme on casual adult swimming attendances at respective leisure sites. (Table13) The results are mixed showing significant reductions at two sites, Ellergreen and Everton Park, while there are significant increases at others. Details are also presented in graphical form (Graph 5)

	Adult Swim 05	Adult Swim 06	Difference	%age difference	Rank
ARSC	2192	3234	1042	32.22	2
Cardinal Heenan	804	1411	607	43.02	1
Ellergreen	14314	12334	-1980	-16.05	8
EPSC	13530	11027	-2503	-22.70	9
Garston	26276	29872	3596	12.04	3
Newhall	3298	3470	172	4.96	5
Park Rd	5795	5675	-120	-2.11	7
PLLC	19392	19206	-186	-0.97	6
Woolton	2875	3022	147	4.86	4
Tennis	0	0	0		n/a
Toxteth	0	0	0		n/a
Croxteth	0	0	0		n/a
Millennium	0	0	0		n/a
Walton	0	0	0		n/a

Table 13. Adult Swim Attendances by site 2005 and 2006.





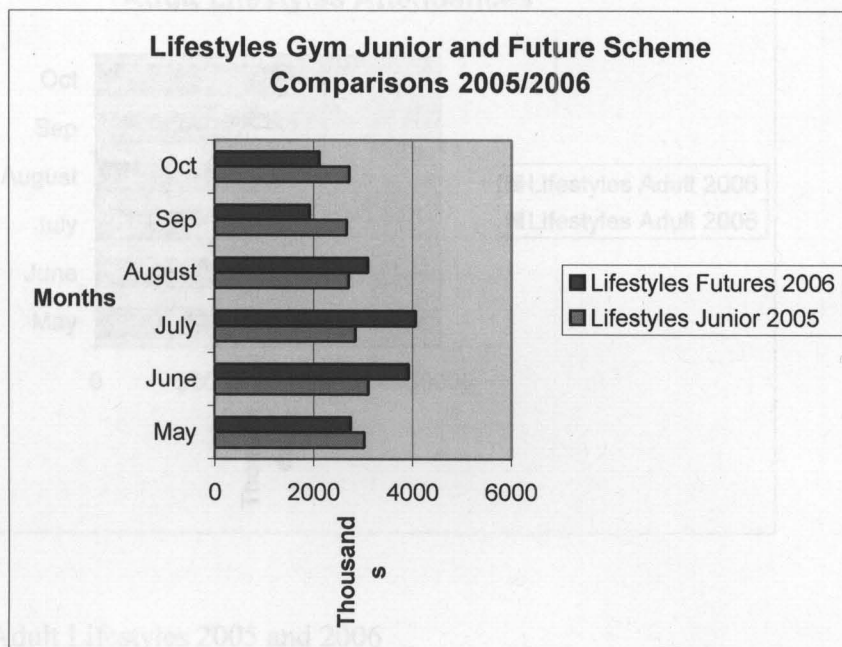
Graph 5. Adult Swim Attendances by site 2005 and 2006.

#### 4.8.2 Fitness Gym

The Leisure Services MIS indicate an overall increase in the fitness gym of 803 attendances, which represents an increase of 4.5%. The trend of the use of the futures fitness gym users appears to be similar to that of the swimming users. There is a dramatic increase and then a decline for the last two months of the period analysed as detailed in graph 6. However the decline is not as dramatic and this may indicate that this user group is more resilient when compared with swimming.

	Lifestyles Junior 2005	Lifestyles Futures 2006
May	3016	2744
June	3110	3915
July	2848	4065
August	2707	3104
Sep	2669	1923
Oct	2719	2121
Totals	17069	17872

Table 14. Lifestyles and Junior Usage 2005 and 2006

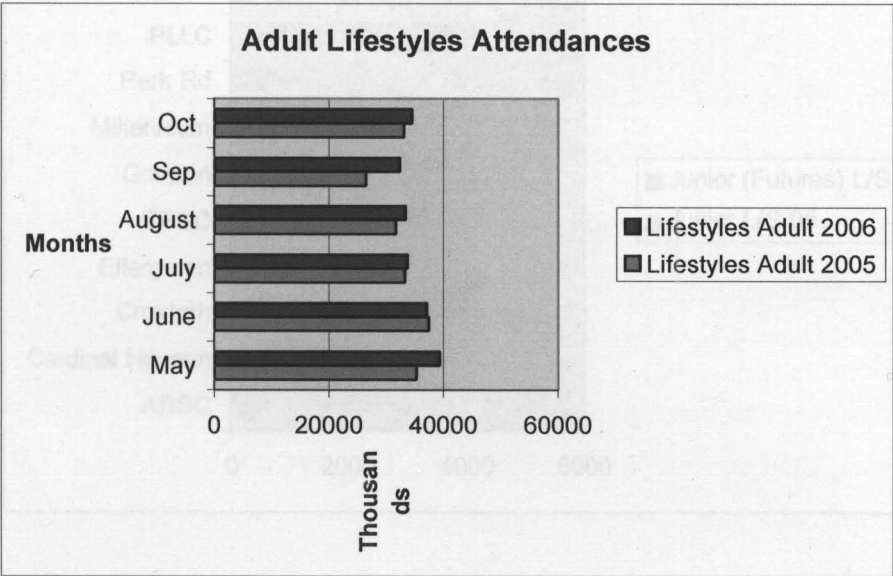


Graph 6. Lifestyles Gym Junior/Future comparisons

Analysis reveals the impact of the Futures Scheme on casual adult Lifestyles Gym attendances (Table 15 ). It appears that despite the initial increasing numbers that the Futures Scheme attracted, adult lifestyles gym attendances have maintained a healthy level and the impact is marginal. This analysis does not concur with the observations within this research when Sports Services personnel have been interviewed.

Table 15. Lifestyles Adult Attendances 2005 and 2006

	Lifestyles Adult 2005	Lifestyles Adult 2006
May	35353	39392
June	37459	37153
July	33319	33771
August	31736	33447
Sep	26583	32377
Oct	33175	34593
Total	197625	210733

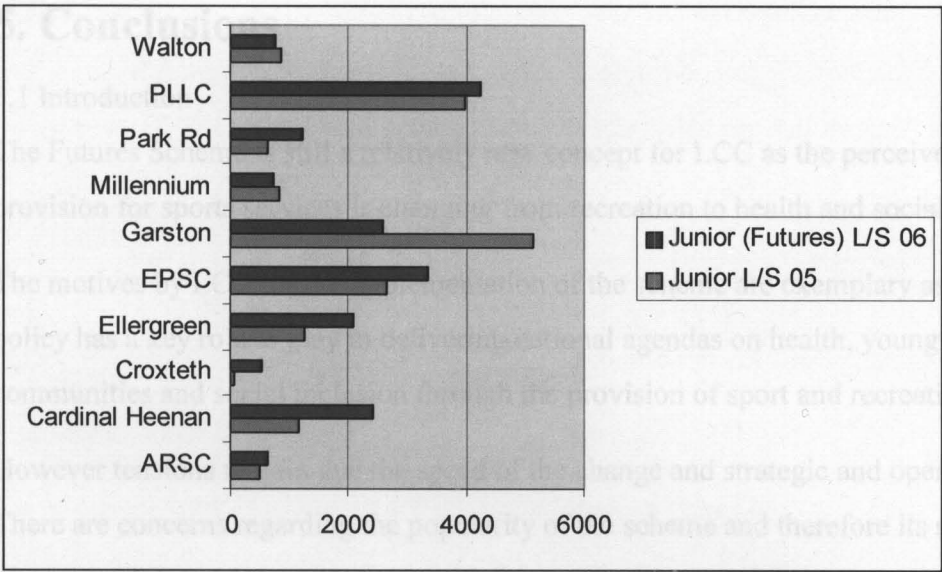


Graph 7. Adult Lifestyles 2005 and 2006

Table 16 details Junior and Future attendances at respective sites and are presented in graphical form (Graph 8). The results indicate increases at most sites with two sites showing significant reductions. The research could not establish the contradictory nature of this data that was obtained from a now disused MIS and it is considered unreliable.

	Junior L/S 05	Junior (Futures) L/S 06	Difference	%age difference
ARSC	498	633	135	21.33
Cardinal Heenan	1162	2404	1242	51.66
Croxteth	64	538	474	88.10
Ellergreen	1244	2101	857	40.79
EPSC	2641	3364	723	21.49
Garston	5144	2596	-2548	-98.15
Millennium	821	715	-106	-14.83
Park Rd	633	1225	592	48.33
PLLC	3992	4232	240	5.67
Walton	870	779	-91	-11.68

Table 16. Junior Lifestyles usage by site



Graph 8. Junior Lifestyles usage comparisons by site

In comparison with swimming there are encouraging indications that interest in the Lifestyles gym usage has increased and has been maintained. A significant difference between the swimming activities and the gym activities is that there is an element of structure to gym usage, fitness programme and regular contact with a fitness instructor, while swimming is available as a casual activity.

4.9 Summary

This chapter the methods of secondary data collection have been illustrated and analysed using a variety of techniques including: semi structured interviews, focus groups and case study material. The sources of the primary data have been Sports Services MIS, and qualitative material available from LCC's market research unit.



## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1 Introduction

The Futures Scheme is still a relatively new concept for LCC as the perceived driver for the provision for sports services is changing from recreation to health and social benefits.

The motives by LCC for the implementation of the scheme are exemplary as the adopted policy has a key role to play in delivering national agendas on health, young people, communities and social inclusion through the provision of sport and recreation.

However tensions remain due the speed of the change and strategic and operational issues. There are concerns regarding the popularity of the scheme and therefore its sustainability. There are also common themes identified in LCC, Wigan and the case study of Glasgow.

The Futures Scheme was introduced to tackle the escalating and high profile issue of unhealthy children due to inactivity and to provide a healthy alternative that could result in less nuisance crime on streets.

The literature review in chapter 2 explores concepts surrounding sport, activity and children and building blocks emerge from which an idealistic conceptual model (figure 2) can be formed. These blocks (2.13) illustrate a holistic and joined up approach. Stakeholders identified for qualitative research included sport, health professionals, front line staff and children. Much of the literature review discussed barriers to activity for children with Coulter (2002), challenging price as a perceived barrier. LCC's Futures Scheme was introduced with the removal as price of a barrier to attract more children to their leisure facilities.

The literature review establishes that enabling and providing opportunities for activity for children, and improving health is complex, but again tensions are prevalent particularly with the contrasting views of children and teachers being a case in point.

The views of PE teachers (2.4.1) and the perceptions of children to exercise (2.4.2) illustrates polarised stances, and undoubtedly warrants further research but for the purpose of this paper is taken as reasonable indicators of adult and children's respective opinions.

The methodology adopted was to utilise secondary data from MIS and customers surveys. This research acted as a catalyst for LCC to commission its own market research section to

explore the views and perceptions of children regarding the Futures Scheme. Primary data was sourced from Glasgow and Wigan, while qualitative data was obtained from Sports Services staff. The research sources and themes identified are summarised in table 17.

Research Source	Themes Identified
MIS	Scheme Impact and structure
Semi-structured Interviews	Charges
Focus groups staff	Role of Schools
Focus groups customers	Budget Implications
Other local authorities	Operations and Planning
	Health

Table 17. Research sources and themes

Change, is a word that is cited by many in the research and combined with policy drivers identified, the research concludes that the scheme does represent a strategic change for LCC’s Sports Services. The change process was not resisted due to the perceived motives for its introduction but findings do indicate that it was source of stress and frustration.

Statistics from the longitudinal analysis of children’s swimming attendances indicate a surge of interest, and then a dramatic decrease. Similar findings were also cited in the case study of Glasgow.

### 5.2 Critical Evaluation of the Adopted Methodology

#### 5.2.1 Case Study

A number of enquiries were made to other local authorities for information regarding similar schemes. Two authorities Glasgow and Wigan issued invitations to provide further information but the information provided by each authority may be inconsistent as it was

provided by respondents with different roles. The respondent from Glasgow had a policy designation while the Wigan respondent had an operations role. The information obtained was useful but due to the diversity of authorities 'local' parameters will influence some of the findings. One authority provided more information than the other and is of some frustration that other local authorities did not respond.

### 5.2.2 MIS

Sports Services MIS for the duration of this report has now been replaced as it was proving inadequate. Some of the statistics obtained have proved not to be reliable and therefore the validity of samples may be questioned. To counter this a broad spectrum of information was sought to build a reliable investigation.

### 5.2.3 Staff Focus Groups

Despite assurances made during the collection of data during the focus groups stage the designation of the researcher may have influenced responses. This could have resulted in responses as being what the respondent perceived as a correct response rather than an honest view or perception. The focus groups were formed as a request to their respective line manager and their selection could also have been influenced by who they considered to be the most suitable rather than a preferred random approach. The focus groups did include a range of designations of front line staff however a larger sample could have been obtained if a questionnaire method had been adopted.

### 5.2.4. Children's Focus Groups

The sample obtained for children's focus groups was smaller than had been hoped for due to recruitment difficulties. Incentives were available to respondents with sports vouchers and therefore the motives of the respondents could be questioned.

5.2.5 Informal Semi Structured Interviews

Notes were taken at all the interviews and respondents were allowed to elaborate on responses. This did result in some responses elaborating on subjects that were not relevant to the research question. This could have impacted on the diligence of note taking but participants were reluctant for interviews to be taped.

5.3 Conclusions about the Research Question

5.3.1 Impact on children and young persons usage

The introduction of the Futures Scheme was intended to increase the numbers of children and young people attending Sports Services leisure facilities. Statistical analysis in chapter 2 indicates that there was surge of attendances by children at the introduction of the scheme and that there also was a significant reduction after a summer peak in 2006.

5.3.2 Product Life Cycle

When the Futures Scheme is analysed comparisons can be made using product life cycle and there appears to be concerns regarding the longevity of the scheme. (Figure 5)

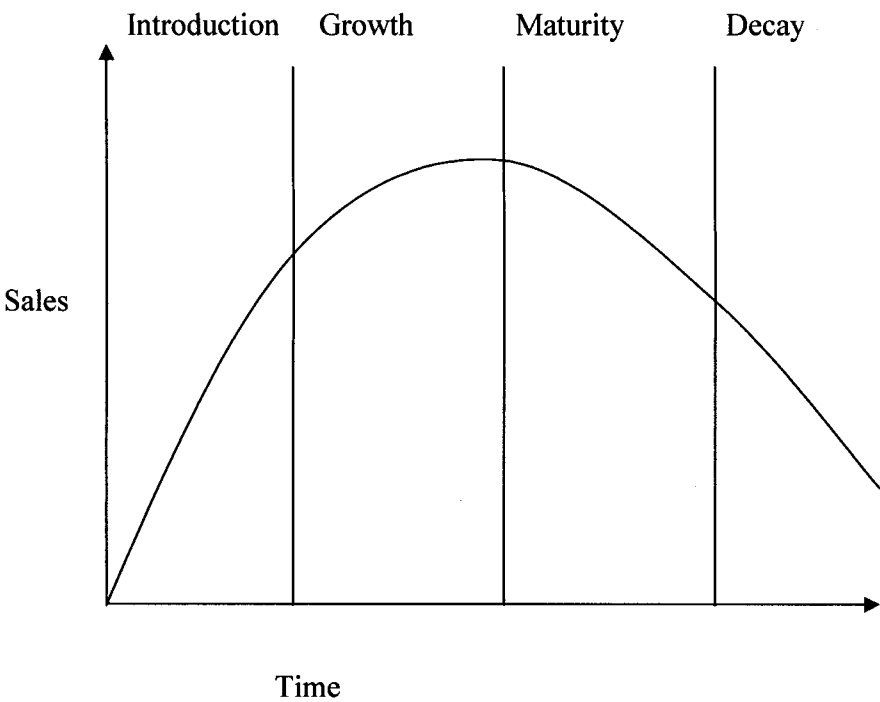
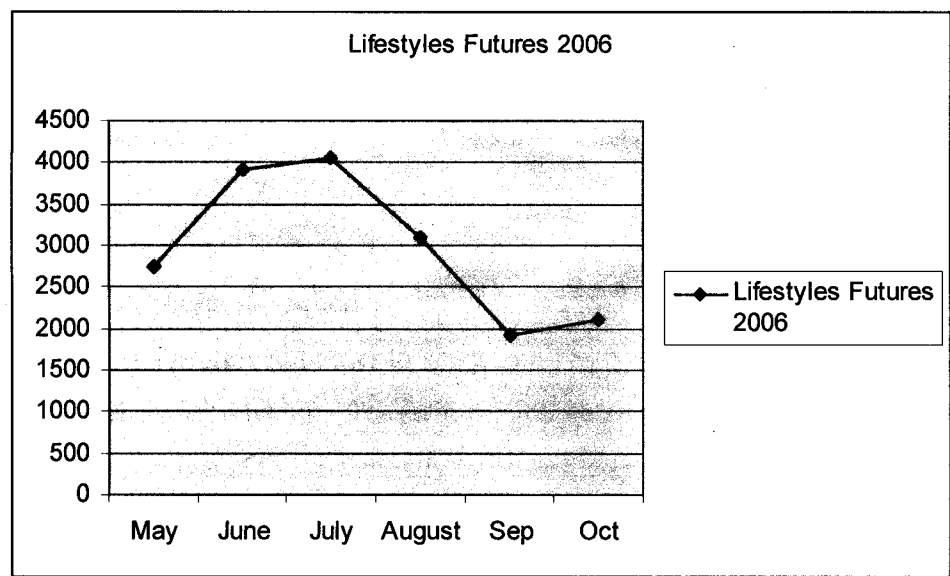


Figure 5 Product Life Cycle



Allowing for seasonal trends in swimming pools where they are more popular in the summer months than the winter months, the decline in attendances in the futures scheme mirrors closely the product life cycle in figure...The scheme appears to be in a rapid decline for casual swimming for children after only 4 months as the following graph illustrates a striking similarity with the Product Life Cycle Analysis.



Graph 9. Lifestyles Futures Usage 2006.

The seasonal variations for swimming pool use are that the summer months are the busiest but the last two months in this analysis indicate that the impact was insignificant.

Proctor (2000) cites that one of the reasons that a product enters the decline stage is the shifts in consumer taste. Free swimming for children was initially popular but this element of the scheme has not sustained growth and has actually gone into decline. It could be argued that the free swimming is not sufficiently stimulating to maintain a reasonable and satisfying demand.

There are observations from different sources that include Sports Service Staff of a variety of designations, a health professional, and children within the research that support this:

- Section 4.3.7 - *'I think the scheme has now lost its way and we need structured sessions. More diversity and choice needed. Allowing access to the pool and just messing about is not really exercise, they need more'.* (Supervisor).

- Section 4.4.1., children's peer sessions '*...look to have more floats and slides etc. in the swimming pools*'.
- Interview LCC2 - *I think that it (the Futures Scheme) has had a limited impact and we should have had more resources for coaching classes. This would give it more structure and control..*
- Ref: HP1 - *I think that from a customer expectation point of view there would be a structure to it. For example if I dropped my children off at a local leisure centre I would expect then to be welcomed by someone who was running the scheme.*

### 5.3.3. Charges for the Scheme

Charges as a perceived barrier to sport could be a misconception as argued by Coulter (2002) who researched the free swimming scheme in Glasgow. His report concludes that free access can lead to substantially increased usage but the high volume of increases can not be sustained. Price is cited by Proctor (2002) as just one element of the marketing mix and this appears to have been altered with no evidence of consideration to the other elements that include: promotion, product, place, people, processes and physical evidence. If the launch of the Futures Scheme for free swimming is considered from a marketing strategy Proctor (2002) cites two reasons for new product failures: products lack useful/uniqueness and planning is poor during the introduction phase. A health professional based in Liverpool also has similar views:

Ref: HP2 - *I think the price barrier may be more of a perceived barrier and some 'hand holding' is needed for some children.*

### 5.3.4. The role of Schools

The schools were considered to be the most appropriate location for the distribution of membership cards for the Futures Scheme. There is little evidence of Sports Services receiving significant support from the schools; however the aforementioned 'rush' to introduce the scheme may be a contributory factor. Many of the membership cards were issued from leisure sites as the schools did not issue them after receiving them. Schools are cited as being key partners.

*LCC5 – There are key partners and this includes the Primary Care Trusts (PCT), Youth Services and schools.*

However there is no formal link with the education establishment identified and hence the 'buy in' from the schools can be described as patchy at best. The lack of support was cited.

*LCC4 – The schools were used for issuing the passes but they weren't interested in getting behind it. Most of the children turned up without any details on the card.*

None of the respondents indicated that a person from an education establishment or administration that supported the scheme.

Green and Thurston (2002) argue that there are health promotion gaps in the delivery of exercise by PE teachers and this may account for some of apathy towards the scheme but there is also no evidence of formal dialogue with schools.

#### 5.3.5 Budget and Planning Implications

There is considerable frustration expressed regarding the budget for the Futures Scheme as being too inadequate and there was no consultation with the managers interviewed in this research.

*LCC3 - I have budget concerns and I don't think that it has been fairly offset and has put us under even more pressure.*

*LCC2 - There was an impact on the budget with additional staff costs and problem users*

In terms of input controls, Jones and Pendlebury (2000) outline how budgets provide the essential link between planning and control. Planning is achieved by identifying the resources required to achieve objectives however there has been frustration expressed on budget allocation from managers with cost centre responsibility. However one interviewee concedes that budget frustration in LCC, and most likely local government, is always a source of frustration.

*LCC5 - There will be budget pressures but there always is but the change in direction allows us to show how valuable we are.*

However in the words of the Audit Commission, "it (budget preparation) consumes a significant amount of time, effort and resources, but often focuses upon short-term goals and is only loosely connected to the service and strategic planning process" (World Class

Financial Management, 2005). From an operational perspective there appears to be awareness that the current budget procedures of public sector organisations are unsatisfactory regardless of change or strategic goals.

Poor planning is cited within this research:

LCC3 - *'There was no consultation and I don't think it was well thought through'*

LCC4 - *'It was introduced far too quickly and we were not consulted...I was embarrassed.'*

Mintzberg, Quinn, and Ghoshal (1999) state that, a strategy is the pattern or plan that integrates an organisation's major goals, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole. A well formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organisation's resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment and contingent moves by intelligent opponents. The speed and the lack of preparation that operation managers cite indicate that the launch of the scheme resulted in the service being ill prepared. This also manifested itself in stress for front line staff.

*'It was very stressful on the pool, it was full to capacity and the kids would not behave...'*  
(Recreation attendant/lifeguard);

*'It was stressful. It felt like we had been hit with a sledgehammer and that we had no authority.'* (Supervisor)

#### 5.3.6 Health

Health issues are a common theme that is referred to from different sources.

LCC3 - *'There are obesity and health concerns for children. It's in the papers all the time or on the news. If something isn't done now we will be paying the health bill in 30 years time.'*

*'What about vending machines? We can't say to children, do this and do that, it's good for you, when we have our machines full of rubbish. That doesn't make sense'* (Fitness Instructor)

Despite there being awareness regarding fitness and children, and expressions of frustrations about 'unhealthy' vending options, no one expressed a view to specific recommendations. It appears that the awareness was due to the amount of media coverage that the subject receives.

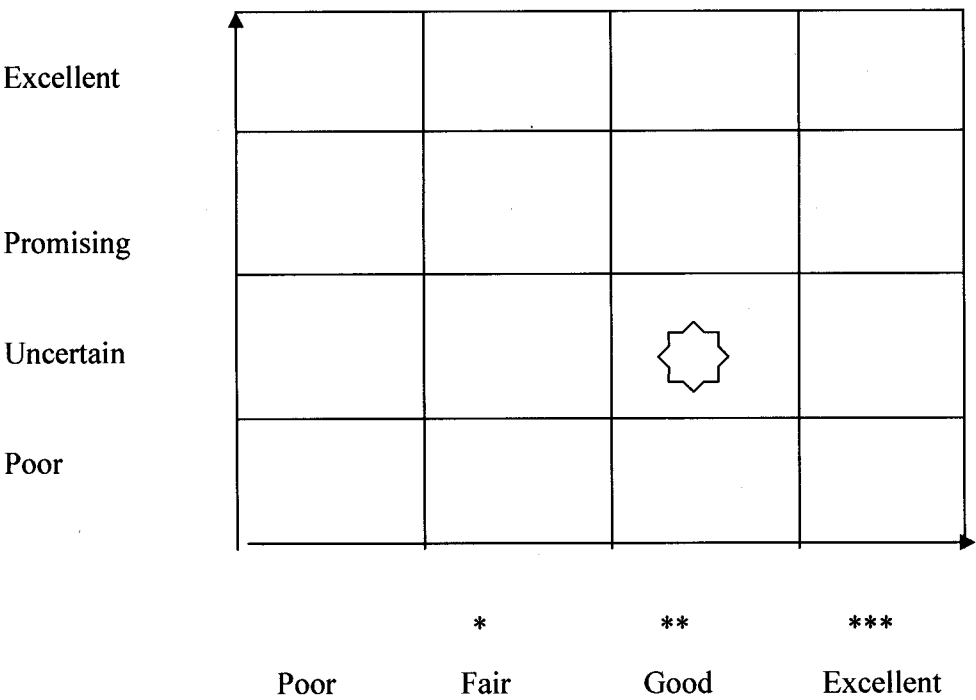
#### 5.4 Conclusions about the Research Problem

The comprehensive assessment (CPA) of the Sports Services had assessed that its service delivery was two stars. Liverpool City Council (LCC) has stated its intent for its service delivery to be in a three star category and be considered as an excellent council. The strategic driver for change is to become an excellent council.

LCC restructured its portfolios in 2006 so that Sports Services is now included under Cultural Services Portfolio. The Cultural Services Portfolio attracts considerable media interest due to its role in planning for the Capital of Culture 2008 and it appears that Sports Services profile is rising.

However the Audit Commission inspected the Cultural Services in October 2006 and it was assessed as providing a 'good', two star services however it is judged as having 'uncertain' prospects for improvement. Considering the high profile that the Futures Scheme attracted and the change of intent, the 'uncertain' judgement may also indicate that the Scheme has not achieved a strategic fit.

Figure 6 CPA Scoring Chart (1)



Source: Audit Commission

(1) The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service also on a four-point scale.

It is cited in the report that there has been a focus on tackling childhood obesity as it recognises the Futures Scheme has increased participation by targeted groups and hence lifestyle changes have taken place. However questions remain regarding operational and strategic impacts, and in particular how the council intend to evaluate the effectiveness of the scheme.

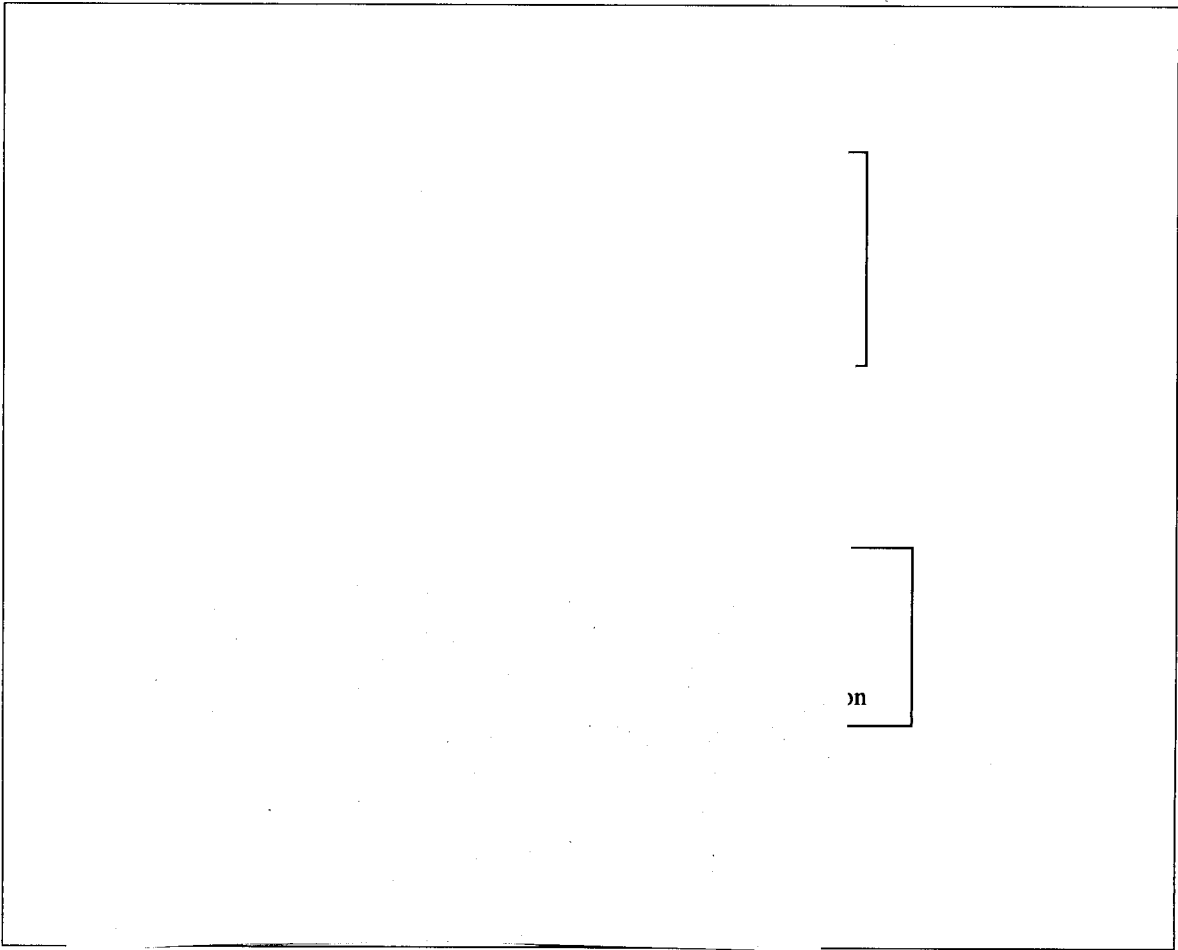
5.4.1 Change Management

Thornhill et al, (2000), cites that effective evaluation and promotion of change requires the systematic collection of data that are subsequently analysed and findings presented in some form. The data available to LCC via its MIS indicated that there were falling swimming

attendances, particularly for children. Combined with the health and social driver the argument for change was compelling.

However this may be an incorrect assumption as senior managers may have wished to implement a scheme that is driven by measuring performance and assess the impact. Perhaps the impact of number of swims without a health agenda may now be considered as being limited, particularly as the service is discretionary. As cited, Burns (2004), in a manner reminiscent of Mintzberg’s (1994) definition of umbrella strategies, Pettigrew et al (1992:297) write of instances where change is both ‘intentional and emergent’. This is pivotal moment for Sports Services as the evidence indicates that although change has occurred there must be a realisation that the existing scheme is not a ‘fait accompli’ for strategic objectives. The scheme needs to act as a catalyst for further change.

Figure 7. Three Components of Change, Futures Scheme adapted from Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991.



If the scheme continues to evolve it will resemble emergent change, as Burnes (2004) cites, the emergent approaches organisational change as an ongoing process of adaptation and ever-changing environment. The challenges for sports services are to maintain and improve performance and form alliances with key stakeholders.

The DCMS's approach to sport is that of shared priorities of central government and local government as it considers this has the potential to make a real – and increasing – impact on the delivery of local sports provision. Local authorities are expected to deliver the outcomes set out in the shared priorities of central and local government.

In the revised approach to comprehensive performance assessment (CPA), from late 2005 onwards, the delivery of the shared priorities by local authorities will form part of the corporate assessment block.

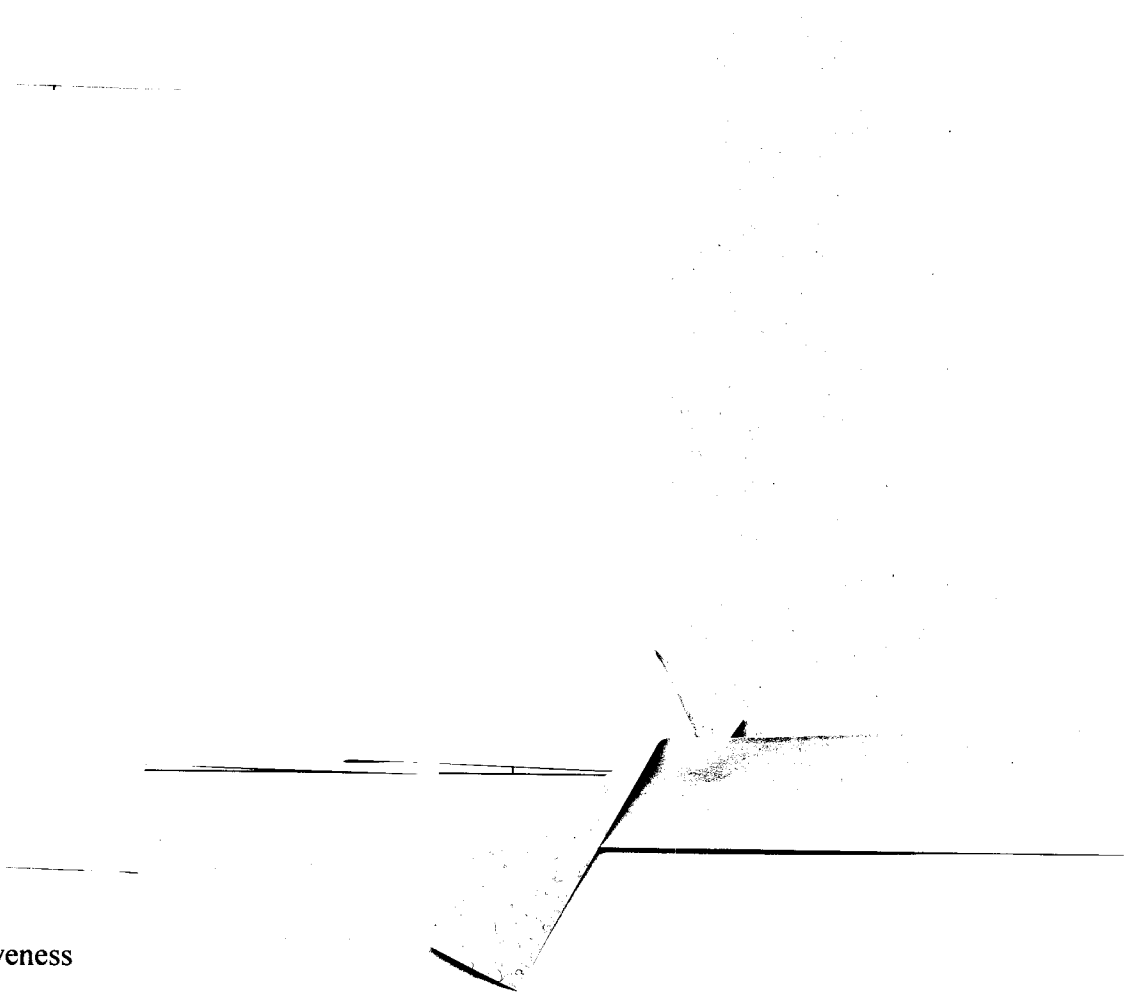
This is a significant challenge particularly as quantitative data is indicating with falling attendances will require further changes. However the data available for Sports Services has now considerably improved since it technological investment has improved its MIS. The original MIS could track user usage in a limited manner but only by utilising the expertise of an IT specialist. The process was unwieldy and impractical. For the organisation (Sports Services) to be both efficient and effective and to move into the winning quadrant it must integrate strategy, people, operations and technology. (Peppard 1995)

#### 5.4.2 Strategy

Strategy is the pattern of resource allocation decisions made throughout an organisation. These encapsulate both desired goals and beliefs about what are acceptable and, most critically, unacceptable means for achieving them, Robson, (1997). Despite the budget frustrations of operations managers regarding the Future Scheme the upgrading of MIS will provide information regarding the profile of their customers rather than totals. (Appendix 12)



Figure 8. Business Strategy Effectiveness Peppard 1995



#### Effectiveness

The new system cited in appendix 12 now enables this process to be conducted by Operational Managers. The system is user friendly and considered more attractive In Appendix 12 there is an illustration of events log that can track facilities and individual activities.

#### Strategic Change

Liverpool City Council's (LCC) executive management team (EMT) have stated their intent to improve services as many of the services that are provided have been identified as being poor by the comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) process. The main strategic driver for LCC to change is to become an excellent council and improve its services. As cited, Mintzberg, Quinn, and Ghoshal (1999)...to manage strategy is frequently to manage change – to recognise when a shift of strategic nature is possible, desirable, and necessary.

Sports Services have recognised that strategic change was desirable and necessary but the adoption of a strategy that would make change possible is challenging. Joyce (1999) cites that the increased demand for efficiency and reduced unit costs may be causing the public service to streamline its operations and this was the main challenge that Sports Services had to face up to. However also cited by Joyce (1999), this situation could be seen as creating tensions. Much of the debate surrounding strategy relates to opinions and views around a variety of tensions and how to deal with them.

There are a number of tensions prevalent in Sports Services concerning strategy. For strategic change the tensions are that of revolutionary change as opposed to evolution, while for strategy formulation there is the deliberate statement of intent against the evolutionary approach. Tensions can be identified internally at operational level as there is frustration as opposed to cooperation. To compound all of these tensions there is also the issue surrounding cultural behaviour of the organisation that would need to change.

The issue of culture needs to be implemented into any strategic process that Sports Services adopts. Johnson and Scholes (2001) cite that one of the main problems organisations face in managing strategic change is effecting changes in organisational culture, and as also cited, is the culture compatible with the strategy being followed by the organisation? This is a key issue for Sports Services when it is addressing its strategic choices. However Sports Services has recognised the requirement for change within a local government context whereby they are required to make a meaningful contribution to safer communities. Without such initiatives Sports Services are subject to accusations of misaligned systems.

As argued by Large (1994), there is a 'short term' versus 'long term' issue with results and a creative solution is required for the strategic problem. There is a possibility that the Sports Services could take a backward step if the momentum that the Futures Scheme is attempting to achieve proves to be unsuccessful. As questioned by Large: Is your organisation like a rocking chair or a car? Statistical analysis and the product life analysis are indicating an imperfect scenario developing where attendances will return to their former levels but without the financial income that the Scheme has sacrificed.

Sports Services has adopted a strategy that develop its organisational change capability but question marks remain regarding sustainability. As Burnes (2004) cites, successful change requires organisations to choose the most appropriate approach for their circumstances, or as emphasised to change their circumstances to accommodate their favoured approach. The City's Vision and Values indicates its desire to become a major European City, and the City's successful bid for European Capital of Culture 2008 is perceived as a catalyst for change. This is the city's vision and the implementation of strategic change is the journey towards it.

This could be interpreted as a premeditated planned process and for a local authority that has a wide range of services and stakeholders, this may not be applicable. Pettigrew (1985 1987) rejects the view that strategy is a rational process of deliberate calculation and analysis and suggests that the organisational though often cloaked in rational and analytical terms is reality a combination of political struggles between groups and individuals seeking to influence policy in their favour. The portfolios of LCC will compete internally for funding, and externally from Central Government and European funding initiatives.

Joyce (1999) however counters against strategy and strategic management in public services as he cites that they are irredeemably short term. He further argues that public services is really been managed through the budgetary process and that everyone is really working only a year ahead at most and raises the question in public services 'is strategic management and planning a political game? Joyce (1999) uses case studies of strategic planning in public agencies in New York to support this view.

It could be argued that this view is too simplistic. As cited by Johnson and Scholes (2005) political processes are regarded as more significant within the public sector, and also argued there is explicit bargaining between executives in the public sector and central government. LCC's successful bid for European Capital of Culture could be argued as being a case in point. This is part of the City's desire to be regarded as a major European City which has in turn attracted increased public funding and private investment and has been accepted as a catalyst for change and regeneration.

### 5.4.3 Operations

Operations strategy is the total pattern of decisions which shape the long-term capabilities of any type of operation and their contribution to overall strategy, through the reconciliation of market requirement with operations resources (p16, Operations Strategy, Slack and Lewis)

The commitment by LCC in terms of policy objectives and financial resources is in recognition of the role that sport and recreation plays within the Capital of Culture 2008 framework and its contribution to the achievement of LCC's overall corporate objectives to improve the health and quality of life of the citizens of Liverpool (Corporate Plan, 2006/07).

Silvestro and Silvestro (2003) contend that there is a real risk of social damage from failing to align operations strategies with corporate strategy in the public sector. The strategic fit between operations and corporate strategy is essential if corporate objectives are to be achieved. This may be the case for LCC with little evidence of strategy and operations being considered together. However with the use of diagnostic tools operation delivery can be broken down to identify components to be improved.

### 5.4.4 The Four V's analysis

The 4 V's model (Slack et al) that cites volume, variety, variation in demand and visibility can indicate the relationship between these operational processes for Sports Services. The pathways in figure 9 indicate the operations pathway on each of the 4 dimensions of the actual Futures Scheme and a potential pathway of a scheme that had more variety (choice).

Figure 9. Profiles of Futures Scheme Existing and Potential

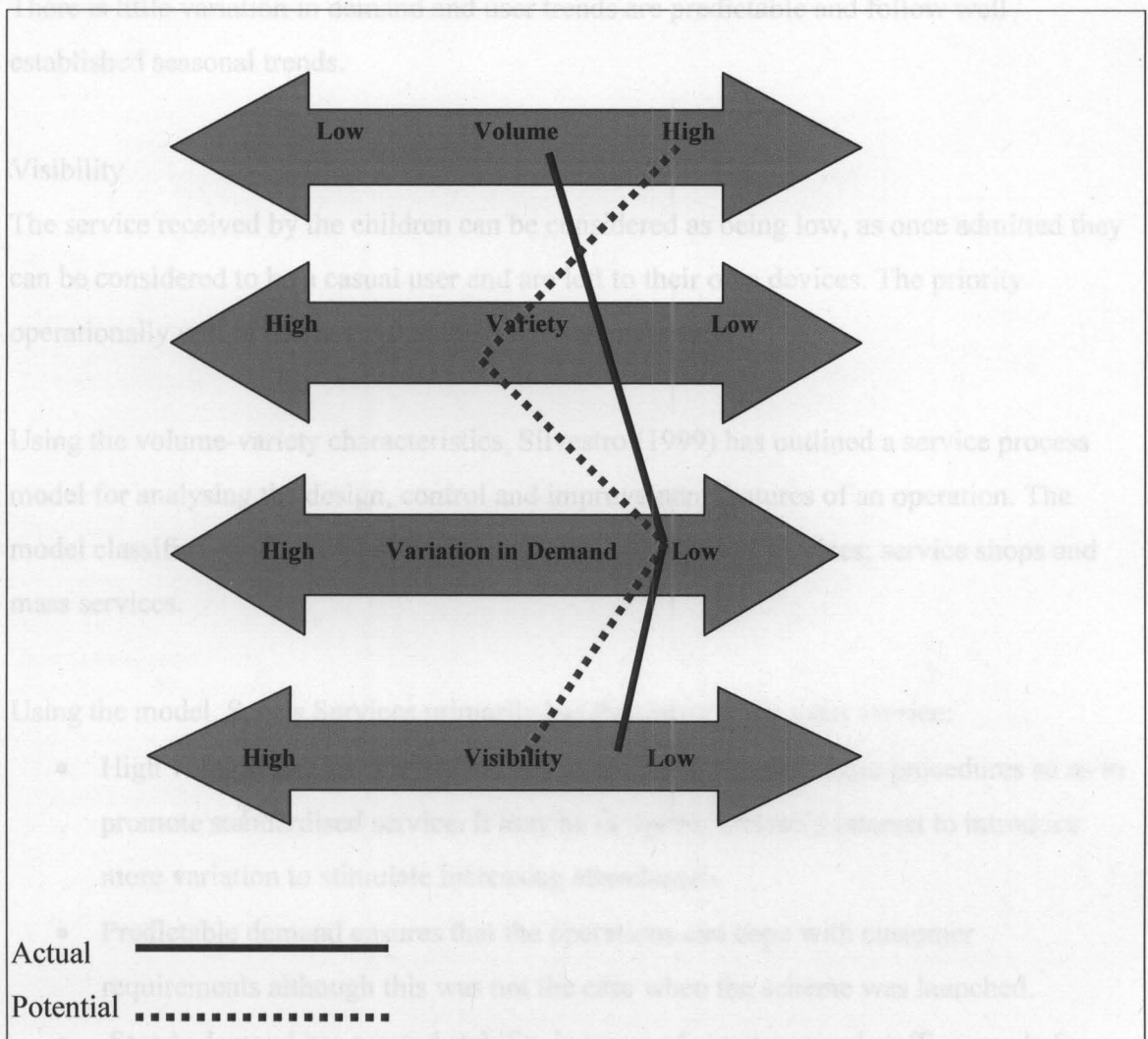


Figure 9. Four V's Analysis.

#### Volume

There is high demand for the Futures Scheme and although there are concerns regarding falling attendances improvements to the scheme may be possible by introducing more choice and structure to the programme of activities.

#### Variety

The scheme requires more variety for children and young people to be attractive and to stimulate more existing users.

### Variation in Demand

There is little variation in demand and user trends are predictable and follow well established seasonal trends.

### Visibility

The service received by the children can be considered as being low, as once admitted they can be considered to be a casual user and are left to their own devices. The priority operationally will be to ensure that the environment is safe.

Using the volume-variety characteristics, Silvestro (1999) has outlined a service process model for analysing the design, control and improvement features of an operation. The model classifies services under three typologies: professional services; service shops and mass services.

Using the model, Sports Services primarily has the aspects of a mass service:

- High volume and low variety has led to an emphasis upon basic procedures so as to promote standardised service. It may be in Sports Service's interest to introduce more variation to stimulate increasing attendances.
- Predictable demand ensures that the operations can cope with customer requirements although this was not the case when the scheme was launched.
- Steady demand has created stability in terms of structures and staffing needs for respective leisure sites

This mixed pattern of low variety and variation coupled to high volume and visibility appears to position Sports Services Futures Scheme as a service shop. The operation is attempting to serve a high volume of children and young persons. Sports Services staff are capable to ensure that the service is delivered efficiently and safely, but customers and staff are citing that the scheme is not sufficiently stimulating. Although Futures is branded as a scheme it is in reality casual use with the charge removed. The decreasing attendances may be indicative that children are not sufficiently stimulated and the previously cited requests for more interesting activities to be made available could be an opportunity for the scheme

to diversify. Coaching and supervised fun type sessions would be located on the service shop point on the volume variety continuum.

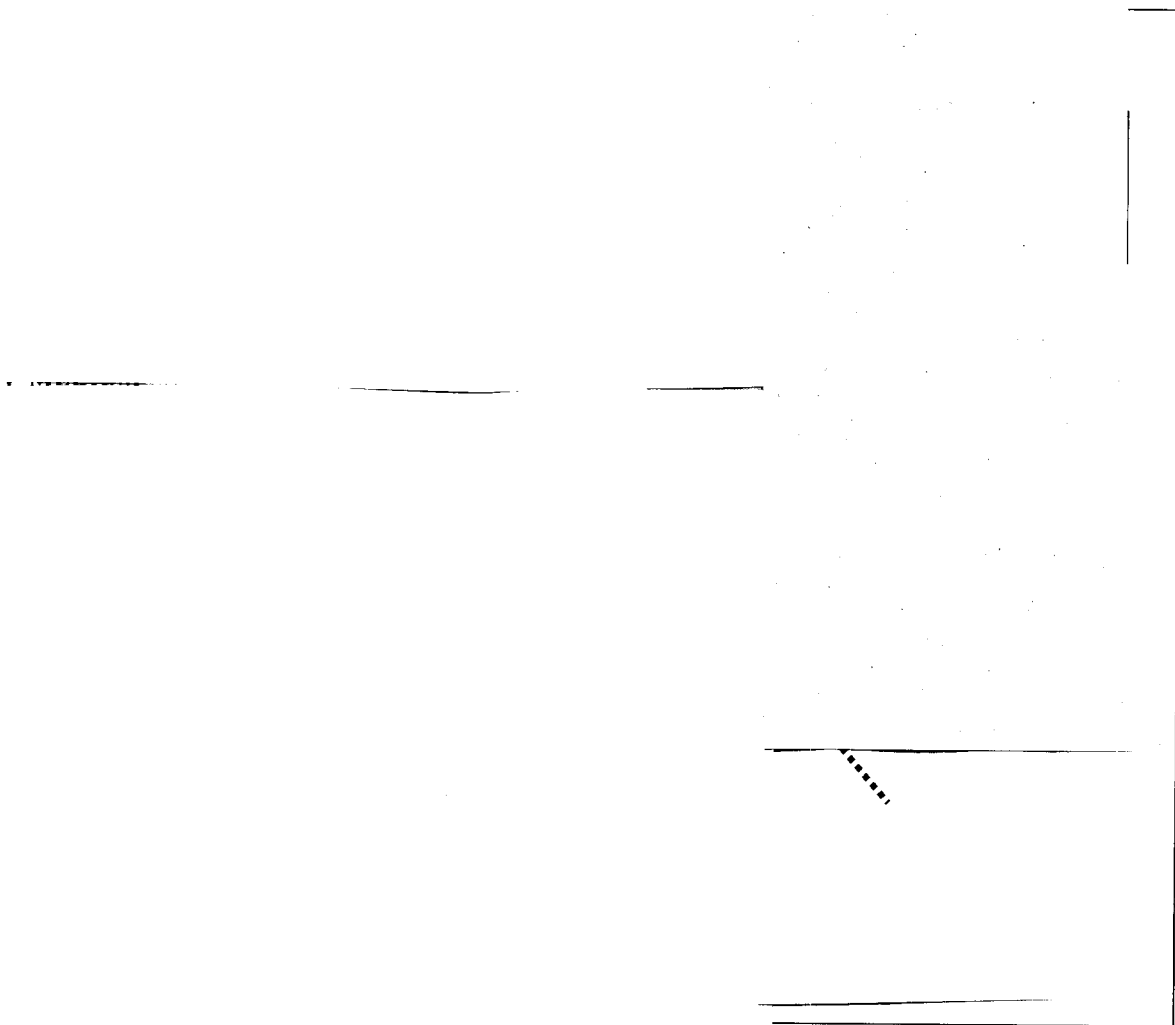


Figure 10. The Service Process Model (Silvestro, 1999)

5.5 Limitations

Limitations to the scheme include the lack of information for further case studies opportunities of other local authorities. A broader sample of information from other local government providers and enablers could have allowed further comparisons to be made. The sample size for the children for the peer sessions proved to be smaller than had hoped due to the difficulty in recruitment of willing participants. The peer sessions were to take

place at three locations rather than two. Ideally more peer sessions would have provided more data

There have been difficulties in co-ordinating focus groups of front line staff and ideally data should have been collected from larger numbers. Regrettably due to operational constraints, making front line staff available, there were difficulties encountered. Secondary data analysed on Sports Services MIS was limited due to the lack of detail and incompatibility with other software.

### 5.6 Opportunities for further research

There are opportunities for further research. Statistics have indicated that adult participation increased in some areas and decreased in others when the Futures Scheme was launched. Further investigation would be required to establish whether the causes were due to sociological or other reasons.

As other local authorities have similar schemes further research would warrant the effectiveness of schemes and establish strategic and operational service delivery.

There are issues regarding the provision of vending machines with unhealthy options that have been expressed by Sports Services staff and children and there is an opportunity for further research to examine the impact or perceptions. Similar research has been conducted regarding vending machines in schools.

The research in this paper has not investigated gender or equality issues for customers or staff and bearing or correlation has not been considered for results. These issues offer opportunities for further research.



## **6. Recommendations.**

### **6.1 Strategic Partnerships**

It has been demonstrated that the provision of sporting opportunities to improve health is complex and to evaluate impact it is essential for Sports Services to form an alliance at strategic level with key stakeholders, health agencies and schools. The formation of such an alliance would not only improve efficiency but also raise the profile of the Scheme and the benefits of regular activity for children. Establishing a formal link with the Education Portfolio is recommended to establish comprehensive support of Futures Scheme and health initiatives as there is clearly a 'strategic gap' in the existing structure in LCC. While Glasgow City Council have indicated similar usage patterns attendances have declined less and and the education department appear to have a closer working relationship with their leisure counterparts in this city. Networking with colleagues in Glasgow to establish good practice is also recommended

### **6.2 Consultation**

The Futures Scheme was launched in May 2006 and the full benefits of the scheme have yet to be evaluated but indications from this research are that the impact has not been as entirely effective. Swimming attendances have declined after an initial surge, lifestyles gym usage has increased, while the take up of other activities has been insignificant.

It is recommended that the a consultation process be implemented to establish what activities children and young persons would like to available on the futures scheme.

### **6.3 Review the structure of the Scheme**

Once a consultation process has been completed review the scheme and implement structure to the preferred activities identified. Evaluation of the scheme should be ongoing with the use of robust and reliable MIS to monitor usage and identify declining interest. Ongoing research should also establish activities that will be popular but also active and healthy. It is recommended that the LCC's market research team are commissioned for further research and use the Education Portfolio as the most effective forum to collate useful information. The scheme is presently available to children free of charge and this is

to be reviewed. There are indications that the removal of charges (Coulter 2002) may be a perceived barrier, while structured activities has been cited by staff and children as being appealing and stimulating.

#### 6.4 Operational Review

The operational aspects of the scheme are to be reviewed, in particular budgetary requirements. The Futures Scheme is part of LCC's corporate objectives and dovetails into a range of national policies relating to health and social benefits. There is a real danger of failing delivery unless there is alignment between operations strategy and corporate strategy. It is recommended that goals and objectives are established with all stakeholders to establish the effectiveness of the scheme by utilising Sports Services MIS. However for effectiveness of the scheme within the community to be established other PI's are to be implemented that monitor the health and weight of children, and youth crime figures in the catchment areas of respective leisure sites.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Interview Notes LCC1

What was the driver for the introduction of free swimming in Wigan?

The decline in casual swimming attendances was the main reason. We were aware that Birmingham and Glasgow had introduced similar schemes that had boosted attendances. Birmingham had a 45% increase with an extra 425,000 extra visits each year and Glasgow had an initial increase of 127%. There was a budget option also that resulted in an opportunity to introduce it. Basically, the budget changed due to a major closure and we could absorb the cost.

What were the impacts when it was introduced?

There were stress issues for staff but no increase in staffing costs, which may have posed the question as to whether we were over staffed as the number of users increased dramatically but a lot of existing users was displaced. There was an increase in vending income but this raised concerns regarding unhealthy snacks from some. However figures have shown that there has been a 9% increase in adult swimming as we have put on more sessions. Maybe they are becoming more aware of swimming being available

Operational costs increased particularly utility bills with the number of backwashing required but it was difficult to assess the user profile as our IT system when it was introduced was not up to the job. We have now replaced with Gladstone and we can now look at our facilities upturns and look at figures based on postal codes and socio economic group.

However a problem with the Gladstone system is form filling and literacy has been flagged up as a barrier for some children to get onto the scheme and this could be the type of children that we need to attract to our sites. Getting children of the streets and into a healthy

and safe environment is a priority and some figures that we are now getting shows that uptake in 'Ds' and 'Es' are lower than the rest..

We did have a questionnaire across the trust and now they are very positive about the scheme and the social impact. When children are barred from facilities they lose more so we have to look at ways of attracting them to our sites.

Since we introduced the scheme it has made me think differently about the way we do things. We have to do more outreach work and go out and attract the difficult to reach kids who might be up to no good. We have tapped into NRF grants and have community diversion officers at two of our sites. One of them has played amateur rugby league for Great Britain and he is very good with them and has made a real difference, although I have to admit his size does help. Some of these kids can be quite intimidating. Additional funding has also meant that we can appoint another 10 officers to do similar work in schools and communities.

Are you aware of any reduction in crime?

I'm not aware of any but I'm sure it has made an impact as we approach our jobs differently, outreach work will have an impact but I'm sure that the figures will support it once we can look at them



## Appendix 2

### Interview notes LCC2

#### What was the Impact of the Futures Scheme?

There was no consultation beforehand. There was a decision and we had to get on with it however there was no justification for not doing it just for doing it too quickly. In principle it is a fantastic idea

It had a negative impact on staff as they felt they were under undue pressure. We were doing what the schools should have been doing. We were processing passes for 7 weeks when they should have turned up with the passes already done. The schools didn't support it and communication for its introduction was not good. Written procedures that everyone would follow would have been the right thing to do.

There was an impact on the budget with additional staff costs and problem users. Because of what we have here (flume and leisure pool) it attracts children from all over the city and then we have confrontations and problem users coming back. If they couldn't get in they caused problems outside.

Other user cancelled their memberships and because they were complaints we even had to waive minimum cancellation period.

I understand why the scheme was introduced. The health and obesity issue is everywhere but I'm not sure that cascades down to staff level. If we change our policy the reason for the change should be shared with all the staff and they will get behind it. I think it has had a limited impact on children at risk, the difficult to reach group and we would need outreach work to do this. However that would have to be managed by the DSO. I think the scheme had a limited impact and we should have had more resources for coaching classes. This would have given it more structure and more control. I think children like a balance, play in the pool and then structured sessions and classes or they will get bored. Sports Development has a role to play as there is a community gap that we are not reaching. A

research questionnaire years 4, 5, 6 would tell us what children would want? We need to consult and find out what children like and don't like. The scheme is falling away a bit and I think it needs a combination of play and exercise.

## Appendix 3

### Interview notes – LCC3

What were the operational issues of the Futures Scheme?

There was apprehension regarding the volume of customers that would be attracted especially unruly youths. In this area there are a lot of problems with youths having ASBOS and there was a real worry that the troublemakers that we normally keep out would come and have a 'free for all'.

I have budget concerns and I don't think that it has been fairly offset and has put us under even more pressure.

The lifestyles gym needed closer supervision with children treating it as a play area. There were a lot of health and safety concerns due to the surge of demand that were not ready for. There was no consultation and I don't think it was well thought through. I'm not sure that staff perceived the value of the scheme and there were a lot of problems for a few weeks. There were control issues and a lot of confrontations. There are two gangs in this area and we are stuck in the middle and the staff were worried that there could be serious incident such as a shooting. In staff meetings staff said that we should have been better prepared and I think that there may be a training need.

We worked more closely with health partners and the Alt Valley Youth Committee. Other user thought it was terrible and that the scheme was a glorified child minding service. There were complaints on Radio Merseyside and as a result we introduced family only sessions as youths were taking over and there were confrontational flash points with other users in the pool. Staff have to gain more understanding of children. Youth Services have offered their support and partnership approach would be preferred.

Some activities don't see any real throughput and they leave after 5-10 minutes and this happens in lifestyles also. A lot of time they just want to hang out with their friends.

Sports Development should have a role to play but we don't work closely with them. For it to be appealing to children we should maybe include sports activities and even extend it to 19 and 20 year olds. People over 60 should have their own scheme to keep them active and

healthy. My figures now say that it is not as popular as it was and it needs to be looked at again

Was there any HR or staffing concerns?

The staff struggled at first and although no one said it the staff did look more stressed, however there was no sickness issues but they did complain to me at first about how the situation was getting out of hand. There were also comments from the staff that there had been very short notice but they did recognise that there was a need for it. One member of staff said that it will safeguard our future.

What is your understanding for the reason that Futures has been introduced?

There are obesity and health concerns for children. It's in the papers and press all the time or on the news. In this area it could be an alternative to being on the streets and getting drawn into gangs and ASBOS. If something isn't done now we will be paying the health bill in 30 years time.

## Appendix 4

### Interview Notes LCC4

What were the operational impacts of the Futures Scheme?

It was introduced far too quickly and was not consulted. It was just mentioned that it was on its way. The schools were used for issuing the schools but they weren't interested in getting behind it. Most of the children turned up without any details on the card. I was embarrassed. We weren't ready, financial procedures were flaunted.

It had a bad effect on the gym; it took the atmosphere away from the gym as there were swarms of children. Adults were telling me that they come to the gym to get away from children, have their own space, but they were very unhappy. We had to introduce sessions to give some balance but it was very rocky transitional period.

There was extra stress on the staff and some experienced a loss of confidence as they adapted to the scheme. Some of children were anti social and some had ASBO's and so it was tough on the staff.

I know that obesity for children is a growing problem and that is one of the reasons behind this and if it is keeping children off the street crime in the area will go down and I think that it has, but some of it didn't work. We know that some heavy children came to the gym and they were self conscious in front of adults and also some of our heavier adults were uncomfortable in front of children. We were trying to keep everyone happy and we haven't the area big enough to do that.

Our budget was altered and our income targets were not adjusted realistically but it wasn't enough although secondary spend would offset some of it but again are we sending mixed signals? We say health is a reason and then we make sure our vending machines are full of fatty snacks, sweets and crisps.

I think we should have poured some resources into recruiting coaches to help us cope and give more choice and structure, dance coaches, female football coaches, and fitness coaches is the way to go. If it is for health should we look at the 60 plus and let them in as well, as long as our budget and targets are adjusted.

We have got closer ties with partners as a result such as the some youth workers who are based here that do outreach work although I would prefer if we managed them directly and had more control.

Sports Development should be involved however there still is a 'them and us' attitude as they have an elitist attitude. If you have no potential they are not interested. They should be working with the attitude, not distancing themselves from them. They could even help with the schools. We have secondary schools that use us and do basketball, badminton, and football, but the teachers look negative.

## Appendix 5.

### Interview Notes LCC5

Why was the Futures Scheme introduced?

The Futures Scheme has been introduced to increase participation. There is now a new regime that considers leisure to be important. There are national strategies that are driven by a health agenda such as the health of the nation. There is to be ongoing evaluation within the schools with reception children and year 6 children to be weighed and measured. This will provide valuable information as to what is working.

What do you envisage the operational impact of Futures Scheme being?

There will undoubtedly be an impact on other users. I'm fielding regular complaints from other customers complaining that the centres are too busy and the children are out of control but people have to realise that Futures is here to stay and that for too long children may have felt they couldn't get in to pools and gyms. The profile of the user is changing and that reason for this changing is a priority. The DCMS want us to demonstrate that we are making an impact in communities and this is the best way – contributing to the health agenda and helping reduce crime although we will have to work on evaluating and establishing this.

There are key partners and this includes the PCT's, Youth Services and Schools and we have to work closely together to try and tackle these issues. It's not only about the Futures Scheme, but it's about participation for all including non traditional sports. The voluntary sector can have a huge role to play here.

There will be budget pressures but there always is but the change in direction allows us to show how valuable we are, the DCMS refer to secondary impact.

We have the Sportslink that gives information about the condition of children and this is great for measuring impact. We have also just invested in a new membership scheme that will allow us to track our users far more accurately. There will be more detail not just numbers.

## Appendix 6

### Interview Notes LCC6

What did you consider to be the impact of the Futures Scheme?

I knew there was going to be an adverse reaction by some customers. It was inevitable. It was causing facility managers a lot of problems and they had to react and change activity programmes. Demand trends changed with initial huge interest and adults complaining. There was no time to prepare and there was some naivety on our behalf. It was an unconsidered decision. I anticipated an impact on direct debit sales and programmes could have been changed to protect them. Attendances by young people for swimming and gym use increased. It should have been promoted so that it would benefit the community rather than antagonise. Adult swimmers were unhappy and they made complaints.

However it could in the long run benefit everyone. We had an adventurous learning pilot scheme where we had funding for children to attend a centre with the school and trying out different activities. The school was very good and supportive and we have received comments about children returning to the centre in their own time with their parents. We have evidence of increased family swim. Maybe some of the will rub off on the kids in the futures scheme but it will be difficult to know.

Operational costs did increase due to maintenance and increased staffing levels. I'm not sure about pool chemicals and utility bills as I haven't assessed yet but their costs will have increased.

Sickness levels before and after the scheme has yet to be assessed but I am not aware of any major HRM issues but for the future we have to be more progressive. We have to develop staff and skills so that the scheme will be stimulating and self-sustaining. We should develop staff to teach or coach for example the rules of games like squash. For this type of personal development we need more money. We should also provide taster sessions for martial arts and things like that. Partnerships could work in this area but yet to be explored and sports clubs and sports development section could have important roles to play. This could help with minority sports such as hockey. However the scheme needs to develop and to strike a balance so that it has a fun element and not too prescriptive. We have fun in the pool sessions but structure in the gym, it needs more consideration.



I imagine that the impact on health will be positive but this has not been measured and I don't have any information on the impacts on crime figures. Our new Gladstone system will provide us with far more detailed information about all our users including Futures. We can then assess how well it is working and where, and we can target specific areas. The nexus system had limitations.

Our budget is under pressure and we need more due to the increased attendances that we no longer receive income from. More resources are needed to develop and progress the scheme and we need to develop existing roles/ A schools sports partnership would be good but transport is a big hurdle for schools. They have their own budget pressures. Other providers can help the overall picture such as youth clubs. I believe other authorities are now being pressured to follow suit such as the Wirral and Knowsley. I think the motives for the scheme will benefit the people of Liverpool but extending the scheme to other user groups like the 60 plus is not being considered at the present time, but I know other authorities have done this.

## Appendix 7.

### Staff Focus One

What were your views about the introduction of the Futures Scheme?

It was a bit rushed and we only had one and half weeks to get used to it. It was like the first Splash Scheme. We were sceptical as to whether it would work and there were concerns regarding levels in the pool and what the rest of the public would think. Everyone was quite stressed about it and we were worried about security. There is war going on between two gangs and we are stuck in the middle.

When it started we lost a lot of family use as the kids were just uncontrollable as they just misbehaved on a daily basis. If we took the card off them they just went got another one. It more spending in the vending machines but we're supposed to be promoting health and fitness, that doesn't make sense. I think it's a poor choice of vending especially when we tell the children about the five veg and fruit a day. It's a contradiction. We could have protein shakes and smoothies but there is low shelf life on these things. I haven't noticed any impact on obese children. Some have come in but they just want to hang around.

The pool was full to capacity most of the time and there was a big surge and then it fell off in the summer holidays. I think there was a mixed response because on some weeks were just seeing more of the same children.

The cards were a complete mix up. First they didn't need them and then they had no information on them or they didn't care if they had them. It was very stressful and work was harder. We should move into more structured sessions such as football and martial arts.

They need more than just a normal pool session and we should maybe ask them what they want. Right now I don't think it is appreciated because it is free and it isn't enough although some children are benefiting in the gym with more female users than male users. Girls have more body awareness while boys just want to get bigger. Teenagers are much more image conscious now, it's the way society is now and there is media pressure also.

I know why Futures has been introduced. There are obesity stuff and health issues all over the media. It's probably about crime as well, getting kids off the street. As it settled there is a more familiar relation ship with the children and many kids I now know by name and they

call me by my first name. I think the scheme has now lost its way and we need structured sessions. More diversity and choice needed. I think structured sessions will work well. Children need rules and they will respond to it. Allowing access to the pool and just messing about is not really exercise, they need more.

## Appendix 8

### Staff Focus Two

What were your views about the introduction of the Futures Scheme?

Sceptical because of the extra work involved. I thought the regular older customers would be really put out about it.

Passing the forms out to the schools was a complete waste of time. There was no information about how the pool was; we felt completely over run, it was just poor communication.

We had to introduce sessions but there were still problems. People hated the queues and we couldn't advertise them in advance as we just had to introduce them. A lot of people got very angry. It was so bad we had to get a security guard in the car park and felt that it had been rushed through. There was complete apathy about the passes; children were turning up with more than one or without one. Children were just saying that they were on Futures Scheme and didn't need a pass. They just ran in as if they owned the place. We were getting lots of 'home alone' kids. Kids just dumped here all day because their parents are at work or don't care. We had lots of behaviour problems especially with the attitude. Children from other areas of the city came here and we had problems with gangs and we were constantly breaking up fights. When we told them to not come back as they had been out of order, they didn't care. They said we'll come back when we want or we'll go elsewhere.

Do you think that the scheme works?

Yes and no. We know about getting kids active and attracting younger users and it's also about keeping them off the street so that they are safe but we had so many problems. It was stressful. It felt like we had been hit with a sledgehammer and that we had no authority. We should have had a task force to deal with and look at how the best way to introduce it, a bit like the group who worked on the Gladstone system and that was phased in.

The girls were generally badly behaved, some shocking behaviour, foul mouthed and they just encourage the boys to act the fool and they do just to show off. There were no real

guidelines and we had problems with the admissions policy. Under 8's were slipping through the net because of the numbers we were dealing with.

Existing adults were feeling displaced and there should have been designated entry times, sessions. The age limit was too high as some of them were confrontational and even employed. Adult and direct debit holders just got pushed to one side.

The attention rates of the children in the gym was very low and they were just doing it for the sake of it and wouldn't listen. Girls were just sitting on machines texting each other, laughing and messing about. We should have introduced teenage classes with more structured activities, maybe children's aquafit or even mother and daughter sessions.

Classes for parents and children could work for some with variety and fun in the sport shall.

The free for all attitude didn't work and we could have had sessions with the emphasis on fun then they are getting exercise by playing and they don't even realise it then. The open door policy is not enough and we did have some parental concerns with bullying especially with bigger girls coming in.

Children have more distractions these days with Play Stations and we need to have a questionnaire to see what they want. We have Play Stations in the gym and it a complete and utter waste of time. What about the vending machines? We can't say to the children do this and do that it's good for you when we have our machines full of rubbish. That doesn't make sense.

## Appendix 9

### Staff Focus Three

What were your views about the introduction of the Futures Scheme?

There was uproar from other customers. They were furious and many complained or just left. It was good and bad, but at first we were completely overrun and hammered with children. The wrong ones were getting in, the ones we had kept out. They came back and spoilt it for everyone. There were gangs of children with confrontations with staff. There were some naughty children and people were getting hurt. It had a bad effect on families and they stopped coming until we introduced sessions. Many adults stopped coming at weekends but it wasn't as bad during the week as we had adult sessions on anyway. It was very stressful on the pool, it was full to capacity and the kids would not behave and some were quite threatening.

I know children need to loose weight and the scheme could help to reduce crime, cars getting robbed. Loosing weight is a big thing for young girls and there were more teenage girls than teenage boys but larger women in the gym were really put off by kids in the gym. They use to come in and make comments or just stare or laugh amongst themselves. No one said anything but some adults just never came back which wasn't right. They need to use the gym as well.

The cards were an absolute nightmare. They were supposed to turn up with cards and they didn't or turned up without any details and we just couldn't cope. It just made us look stupid.

I've noticed that the novelty has worn off but it will probably pick up in the summer. There was a lot of vandalism in the toilets and changing rooms when it started and we had a lot of graffiti as well. It was really difficult to keep the place clean.

I know it was brought in to get children off the street but parents have a big effect on children. If the parents aren't interested they won't come along.

It's now settled down but the pool is not as busy as when we were children. We also send out mixed signals with vending machines on the beach selling crisps and sweets. A lot of time they are just messing about and it isn't really exercise. We should give them more structure with classes, girls could go in aerobic classes with their mums, but classes for

children should be shorter as they get bored. Boys are really into football coaching but the role models for girls are all stick thin, it's the media. Girls think that the gym will make them muscular and some come to spinning to loose weight but they don't need to. For females it's about losing weight while for males it's about getting fit.

## Appendix 10

### Interview notes Glasgow

Why was the free-swimming scheme introduced in Glasgow?

There were a number of issues. Firstly it was seen as improving health. The mortality rate in some areas of Glasgow is the amongst the poorest in Europe with CHD issues being the main issue. A way of tackling this problem was seen as to enable more of the population to participate in exercise, particularly swimming. Social inclusion was also considered with many areas struggling with anti social behaviour on the streets and if we could get them off the streets and into something constructive that would make them healthy it would be deemed as a success. The obesity of young people was an increasing cancer. The council decided to offset the budget £250,000. This would be based on the additional attendances, and running costs. There was also academic interest from Edinburgh University.

There was incredible interest initially and it was free for all but we were unable to sustain and struggled to maintain performance. The card to monitor usage came later. However we had to change our approach. At the beginning we had sessions with fun inflatables in the pool and the sessions were really popular but we had to withdraw them because of a couple of accidents. We started to receive claims for accidents of all types. It was a claim culture that changed everything.

When we introduced the cards we did it through the schools and a card that allowed free access to the pools of Glasgow was included in a welcome pack for every child who started school. The information regarding this is still evolving a management information system. The card also allowed children to be rewarded with points and gain rewards by using them for health and nutrition in schools.

The scheme was not popular with existing users who found themselves displaced and there was negative feedback. We ask card holders to evaluate the scheme by providing them with their own link on our web site. They can log on for information about young person stuff in Glasgow and they can post comments about it. We also have free dryside activities for 8 – 14 year olds during the summer holiday but these activities are coached sessions, not a free for all like the pool.

Our secondary spend did increase as a result but we ensured that we introduced healthy options.



It was also recognised that we needed to do outreach work for the difficult to reach young people. We engaged youth teams to link up with hostels for young persons to try and introduce them to the scheme. In the hostels there were many young persons who had been released from young offender units and this intervention was seen as an effort to try and offer an alternative to lapsing back into crime.

The health driver was the main reason behind extending free swimming to the 60 plus age group to try and encourage a healthy lifestyle,

## Appendix 11

### Interview Health Professional

What are your impressions of the Futures Scheme?

I think that from a customer expectation point of view there would be a structure to it. For example if I dropped my children off at a local leisure centre I would expect then to be welcomed by someone who was running the scheme. The scheme is good but if it is about play we need a definition.

I'm not sure it should be on every day for children. There will be social barriers for some children with interesting activities such as dance, but that goes back to structure. I think the price barrier may be more of a perceived barrier and some 'hand holding' is needed for some children. There are social benefits also. The Wandless Report refers to understanding barriers

The scheme will appeal to competitive boys and many boys in Liverpool will identify with football stars like Steven Gerrard.

The schools have a role to play and I think there should be emphasis on competition. Some schools have specialist sports school status and this can also be a driver for academic achievement.

Children must be encouraged to join the scheme and learn how to play. There are not enough play areas and this helps to keep children fit and healthy. However the claim culture is stopping so much including play. It's ridiculous, it's not protecting children, it's protecting adults. The Government need to intervene to get rid of this claim culture as it is stopping so much.